





*Unless the British workers and the Indian people join hands in fighting their common enemy, British Imperialism, it will be slavery and hell for both—this is the lesson of this challenging book, written by a British Communist in answer to the commonly repeated charge —“every Briton is an imperialist.”*



# **BRITISH WORKERS IN ACTION 1800—1945**

**by  
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C O N T E N T S

LETTER TO AN INDIAN FRIEND	1
CH. I. THE CLASS NATURE OF BRITISH SOCIETY	5
CH. II. RISE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT : 1800-1931	16
CH. III. THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM : 1931-39	35
CH. IV. THE WAR YEARS AND LABOUR VICTORY : 1939-45	52
CH. V. BRITISH BREAD AND INDIAN FREEDOM	70
APPENDIX : RESOLUTION ON INDIA	88

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## LETTER TO AN INDIAN FRIEND

*“Every Briton, whether he be Conservative, Socialist or Communist is a reactionary and an imperialist.”*

I have just read these words of one of your national leaders, spoken to a gathering of students. I recalled my conversations and discussions with you and my many other Indian friends and I had to admit that such an opinion is a very common one.

As I read his statement again, my mind went back to the long and bitter struggle of the common people of Britain to achieve their right to free speech, to practise their religion without hindrance and to organise themselves in order to withstand the greed and oppression of their masters.

I remembered John Cornford, the most brilliant student of his generation who was killed fighting for Spanish democracy ; I remembered too, Clive Branson, with whose example you and many other Indians have been so deeply impressed. I thought of the present efforts of the British people to build a free and equal society. Here was a story of sacrifice and struggle which I knew the Indian people would understand, because they have sacrificed and suffered so much in their own struggle.

Between our two peoples stand the barriers of prejudice and distortion which the imperialists, to our shame let it be admitted, have erected and maintained by lies and falsehoods. Never was it more urgent than today, when all humanity is marching forward to end oppression and injustice, for us, Indians and British to tear down those barriers of ignorance and prejudice. Never was it more urgent for us in Britain to recognise that we can never achieve a free and progressive society whilst India remains oppressed and subjected.

You may say at this point that it is to the British people to whom I should direct my arguments. It is after all Britain, or rather the British imperialists, who seek to maintain their oppres-

sion over the Indian people. All that India desires is to be given freedom to work out her salvation in her own way.

I do not deny this. The record of imperialist rule, not only in India, but throughout the colonial empire, is a story of shameful and infamous rapacity. Those many Englishmen who, like myself, have spent some of the war years in your country, who have seen the terrible results of imperialist rule are determined that the British people shall know of the oppression carried on in their name. The poverty of India, after 150 years of British power has bitten deeply into our minds. Our contact with the misery and suffering of your people is not something which can be easily or lightly forgotten. That our duty is to make these things unmistakably clear to our own people there is no question.

Why then, in the pages which follow have I concerned myself with explaining to the Indian people the situation, as I understand it, in Britain today? It is because I believe, profoundly and passionately, that there can be no real advance towards world freedom until the peoples of different countries understand and recognise that in their united strivings is the key to victory.

You would not deny the importance of the British people understanding and lending their support to your struggle for an independence which is unfettered and unqualified. It is, you would say, ignorance and prejudice which bars the way to such understanding and appreciation. To dissolve and eliminate this prejudice and ignorance is our most important task when we return home.

It must be said, however, that among your own people, there are sometimes errors of judgement and perhaps a failure to appreciate the new forces which have grown up in Britain in the past years. Is it really true that all Britons are imperialist-minded; can it be said that the *burra sahibs* of Delhi are truly representative of the British people?

I do not deny that the actions and attitudes of most Englishmen in India have been only too well calculated to breed a bitter distrust in the Indian people. What I seek to show is that the bureaucrats and the hard-faced businessmen who have built their power and their wealth out of the labour and toil of the Indian people are not, and never have been, representative of the British

people. Moreover, it is just these same people who are doing everything in their power to deny equality and justice to the British people themselves.

I do not absolve the British people from the terrible moral responsibility for what has happened in India as the result of British rule. But what I do most emphatically deny is that there is an equality of responsibility between the various classes and sections of English society. The profits which have been wrung from the blood and sweat of the Indian peasant and worker have benefitted the same class which is engaged in a parallel exploitation of the working people of Britain.

There is, in other words, a common bond of interest between the majority of the British people and the Indian peoples. Their enemy is a common one. The imperialist who refuses to grant independence to India is the same imperialist who has so callously betrayed, and so viciously exploited, the interests of the mass of the British people. British bread and Indian freedom go together, not in opposition.

You are, I know, profoundly sceptical when I argue in this way. But I hope to show that the analysis of Britain, as a land of imperialists is, on all counts, wholly inaccurate and untrue. In Britain today, our society is a class society ; one built upon inequality and the denial of opportunity to the mass of the people. In industrial conditions, in education and social progress, the grasping hand of our oppressors deadens and stultifies the desires and yearnings of the common man and woman.

The British people bear the scars of oppression ; they remember the long, frustrated years of unemployment, the high incidence of malnutrition, the growth of the distressed areas ; but in the fight against the exploiting system they have built up their mass organisations and political parties which are daily becoming stronger. The arena is being cleared for the final struggle against their masters.

I ask you : are these things yet appreciated in India ? Does nationalist opinion really understand the significance of the growth, slow though it has undoubtedly been, of a truly progressive movement in Britain ; a movement which not only opposes its own oppressors, but stands four-square against the exploita-



tion of all peoples, both inside and outside the empire ?

It is with the object of showing the Indian people exactly who are the allies of Indian independence, that this short account has been written. For too long have our imperialist masters divided us ; let both our peoples recognise that our firm unity will achieve the speediest realisation of the things we are fighting for—a truly democratic Britain and an independent India, equals in a world which has abolished poverty and want and the threat of war.

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## THE CLASS NATURE OF BRITISH SOCIETY

BRITAIN IS A HIGHLY INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRY. UNLIKE INDIA, agriculture plays a small part in her economy and the majority of people earn their living by working in factories, mines, on the transport services or in the distributive trades. Britain has also the oldest established capitalism. At a time when America and Germany were predominantly agricultural communities Britain had a rapidly growing industry and world-wide commercial interests. During the greater part of the 19th century she was the workshop, the banker and the financier of the world. Even after 1870, when other countries began to develop their own industries and to compete with Britain on the world market, her dominant position enabled her to be first in the field in the mad scramble for colonial possessions and for markets which developed in the last decades of the century.

By 1914 Britain had the largest colonial empire both in area and in population. Her investments abroad totalled no less than £4,000 million (over Rs. 5,000 crores). The period, 1918 to 1939, was one of mass unemployment and world-wide economic depression, but at the beginning of the Second World War Britain was still the most powerful imperialist nation, although in industrial production, other countries, America in particular, had long outstripped her.

Who then, are these British imperialists who have so long played a dominant role in world affairs ? To answer this question we must first find out who owns the wealth and capital of Britain. We shall discover that to an extraordinary degree the wealth of the country is concentrated in the hands of a very small section of the people. The figures that are quoted do not only refer to capital in Britain alone ; they include all investments held by

Britons in foreign countries and the term capital is used to cover all forms of property—houses, buildings, land, investment in industry, banking and agriculture, both at home and abroad.

We find that in 1938 (the last year for which reliable figures are available) the total of private property amounted to 17,000 million sterling. *Of this total, 85% was owned by 7% of the (adult) population.* The remaining 15% was therefore divided among 93% of the people.

These are startling figures. They mean that economic power is the prerogative of a handful of the very rich. In terms of income, nearly one-third of the individual incomes in each year accrues to this powerful minority. This concentration of wealth can be even further emphasised when it is realised that within the figures already given, *1% of the population owns 55% of the nation's wealth.*

Let us analyse further this tiny group in whose control is so much power. These are the monopoly capitalists—the financiers, the industrialists and the landlords. There is no sharp or clear dividing line between the three groups. The banker and the industrialist have become the finance-capitalist, with financial control and interest ranging over the whole industrial field. The landlord is at the same time a large shareholder in industry and banking; the banks and industrial concerns have themselves become large landlords.

Thus we have a process of integration which has concentrated wealth into the hands of fewer and fewer people; an octopus-like control whose economic tentacles embrace all major industries and which reach out not only to the furthestmost corners of Britain but also to the colonial and oppressed countries. No basic industry is exempt from their stranglehold. 80% of the production of the cement industry, for example, is in the hands of one company or its associates.

The Iron and Steel Federation, which includes all the important firms, is able to dictate prices and eliminate competition within the industry. The £75 million (about Rs. 98 crores) concern of Lever Bros. and Unilever Combine control the greater part of the soap and margarine industry, not only of Britain, but of the empire as well. The armament industry is the classic

example of interlocking control between the chemical and engineering industries.\*

The banking system is in the hands of five giant concerns who are in a position, as the London *Financial Times* once stated, to "upset the whole fabric of Government finance" if they so desire. It remains to add that during the war, the control over British economy by the big monopolists has been still further strengthened. There has been, during the past six years, a close state control over the whole of industry and commerce. No one in Britain would deny the necessity for such rigid control in order that the productive resources of the country should be utilised for the efficient prosecution of the war against Fascism.

The point to note, however, is that in each industry the controller was a nominee of Big Business. The Managing Director of Dunlops, the largest rubber firm in Britain, was head of the wartime Rubber Control. Sixty-one former officials of the giant monopoly combine, Imperial Chemical Industries, were employed in key positions in the Ministry of Supply. Such examples could be extended to cover the whole of British economy.

The picture that thus emerges is of a Britain whose economic structure is dominated by a small group of industrialists, bankers

\*In South Wales, the British (Guest, Keen, Baldwins) Iron and Steel Company, Ltd. link up some eighty firms, with an aggregate capital of £60 million (over Rs. 78 crores), a steel capacity of 3,000,000 tons and coal output of about 12,000,000 tons.

Clydeside, in Scotland, is one of the greatest ship-building and engineering centres of the world. Coal, iron and steel are all controlled by large-scale trusts and interlocking combinations. To give one example only, in the 1930s Allan Macdiarmid, one of the most important industrial figures in Scotland was director of thirteen companies and chairman of six. He was on the board of the Bank of Scotland, chairman of Stewarts and Lloyds (who rule the steel tube industry), chairman of large-scale colliery companies in Lancashire and Fife.

Stewarts and Lloyds, it may be noted were directly connected with the 'Big Five' banks and the Bank of England through the Banker's Industrial Development Co. They are likewise linked with three other monopoly concerns, the Lancashire Steel Corporation, the United Steel Companies and Babcock Wilcox (boilermaker). One coal company alone controlled 26 collieries with an output of 4,000,000 tons. Paisley, also in Scotland, is the home of J. & P Coats, who have almost a complete monopoly in cotton thread.

and landlords. These are the 7% of our people who own 85% of the wealth of the country. These are the British imperialists, controlling not only the productive forces in Britain, but in whose interest and on whose behalf the colonial countries are developed and exploited. Prior to 1939, £150 million sterling (about Rs. 196 crores) was received each year as interest on foreign investments. Each year the tribute, a tribute wrung from the poverty-stricken masses of India and the other colonial countries, strengthens and maintains the tremendous concentration of power and wealth of the imperialist groups in Britain.

Britain, however, is a political democracy ; and it is necessary now to discuss the effect of this great wealth and power upon the political life of the country. We have to discover, in other words, how far and to what extent the monopoly capitalists have been able to control public opinion and to guide the law-makers in order that their own interests might not suffer.

We shall find the answer to our question if we look at the social composition of Parliament. In Britain, Parliament is the supreme authority. It can, provided a majority inside Parliament agree, make or unmake any law. There are no legal restrictions upon its authority ; and the British people have the right and opportunity, every five years, to elect those representatives to Parliament whom they think, will best serve the interest and welfare of the people. The elections are by secret ballot and on the basis of universal suffrage for all men and women over the age of 21.

From 1918 until 1945, the Conservative Party had a majority in Parliament, with the exception of two short intervals when the Labour Party, although in a minority, assumed office (—by assuming office is meant forming a Government). At the last election before the outbreak of the war, the Conservative Party (or Tories, as they are often called) were voted a huge majority over the Labour Party. This was in 1935 and owing to the war, this Parliament carried on without a further election until July 1945.

Who are these Tories, and what sections of the people do they represent ? The most important point which emerges from an analysis of Conservative Members of Parliament is the degree

to which business interests are allied to the Conservative Party. In the 1935 Parliament, 181 Tory M.P.s held no less than 775 directorships in industry and banking. These figures may be compared to the proportion of the electorate (i.e. all men and women over the age of 21) who are directors of companies. In 1935

*44% of Conservative M.P.s held company directorships.*

*0.1% of the total electorate held company directorships.*

It is instructive to note the participation of the various monopoly interests in the Conservative bloc in Parliament. There were 85 M.P.s, for example, who were directors of banking, insurance and general financial companies. Between them they held 109 directorships. In the iron and steel, coal and engineering industries, the "backbone" of British economy, 59 Conservative M.P.s had over 100 company directorships. A company director, by the way, is nearly always a large shareholder in the particular concern and is always paid a large fee for the privilege of being a director. The connection between Big Business and Parliament is by no means limited to the number of directorships held by Conservative M.P.s. With very few exceptions, the whole of the Parliamentary Conservative Party are large shareholders in British industry. Cabinet Ministers, for example, are required to relinquish their directorships in companies as soon as they assume Cabinet rank. But they still remain large shareholders.

In 1926, the year of the big coal strike, Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister of a Conservative Government. He held 194,526 ordinary shares and 37,591 preference shares in his family firm, which owns extensive collieries. Neville Chamberlain was an ex-director of the Birmingham Small Arms Company and of Elliotts Metal Company, holding large shares in the latter firm. Many of the Conservative M.P.s have family connections with important capitalist and landlord interests. Mr. R. S. Hudson, who has held many important posts in the last 10 years, is related to a family which is now part of the Lever Bros. and Unilever Combine. Sir Samuel Hoare is the son-in-law of Earl Beauchamp, who owns 18,000 acres, the gross annual value of which is £25,000. The sanctimonious Lord Halifax, ex-Viceroy of India and now Ambassador to the United States is a big land-owner. His son

was an M.P. in the 1935 Parliament and married into the Derby family, one of the richest and oldest of the ruling class families. The Derbys are connected by marriage with the Londonderrys, great coal-owners and landlords.

The Conservative Party is the Party of rich men. It is almost impossible to become a Conservative M.P. without a large independent income. "It is incontrovertible" wrote a Conservative woman in 1938 "that only those with fairly large private incomes have any hope of being able to enter Parliament as Conservatives, while poor men affiliated to the Labour Party have a good chance of obtaining election eventually." Mr. Duff-Cooper, one of the leading Tory politicians and today British Ambassador in France said in 1939 :

"It is as difficult for a poor man, if he be a Conservative, to get into the House of Commons as it is for a camel to get through the eye of needle."

A detailed account of the inter-connections and relations between Big Business and the Conservatives would require its own study. It is clear, however, that there is complete harmony between the monopoly capitalists and the political party which has dominated Britain for so many years. Conservative M.P.s are either directors or have large share-holdings in business ; businessmen, bankers and financiers enter Parliament as Conservative M.P.s. Naturally the decisions of the Conservative Party will never harm their own interests as capitalists and landlords. The history of Parliamentary legislation is a story of the victory of the property-owners over the welfare of the people. The conclusion is inescapable that the Conservative Party has acted as the very efficient executive committee of the landlords and the capitalists.

There are other ways in which the ideas, the power and the influence of these groups are developed. The control of public opinion is an example. In Britain today the Press to a very large extent is a capitalist monopoly. Other papers which publish radical or revolutionary views are boycotted by the advertisers and to produce a daily paper is made very difficult. The *Daily Worker*, organ of the British Communist Party is only able

to keep going with the help of £4,000 (about Rs. 50,000) which is subscribed each month by the working people. The degree of monopoly in the newspaper industry is considerable. The Astor family, with large banking and financial interests, owns the influential *Times* and *Sunday Observer*. Lady Astor and her son were both in the 1935 Parliament. The Berry Brothers who own two leading national papers and a host of provincial journals are connected with coal and heavy industry. Lord Beaverbrook whose son is now an M.P., controls among other papers, the *Daily Express* which has the largest national circulation in Britain today.

With the exception of the *Daily Worker* and *Reynolds News* (the latter being a Sunday paper owned by the Co-operative Movement) all the national dailies are owned by big monopolists. Even the *Daily Herald*, organ of the Labour Party, in 1930 became part of the millionaire newspaper trust, Odhams, who now hold 51% of the controlling shares. Political control nominally remained in the hands of the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party.

The circulation of all national newspapers supporting the Conservative Party is more than twice that of all other papers. In the provinces, the disproportion is much greater, in as much as almost all the provincial and local papers are controlled from London by the big newspaper trusts of Beaverbrook, the Astor family and the Berry Brothers.\*

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\*NATIONAL DAILIES CIRCULATION

Millionaire Press, speaking for Big Business and Tory interests			
<b>Daily Mail</b>	1,750,000	<b>Daily Mirror</b>	2,000,000
<b>Daily Express</b>	3,000,000	(Generally progressive)	
<b>Daily Telegraph</b>	850,000	<b>Daily Despatch</b>	435,000
<b>Daily Sketch</b>	320,000	(Manchester)	
		<b>Manchester Guardian</b>	85,000
		(Liberal)	
<b>Progressive Press</b>		<b>Daily Worker</b>	109,000
<b>News Chronicle</b>	1,470,000	(Communist)	
(Liberal)			
<b>Daily Herald</b>	1,800,000		
(Labour)			

N. B.—These figures are wartime circulations, the quota of paper allowed being based on pre-war circulation. The *Daily Worker* is in



The higher ranks of the Civil Service have been, up to the present time, a preserve for the sons of the wealthy classes. Only those who can afford a University education are able to compete for the more important positions ; and such key departments at the Treasury and the Foreign Office have been limited almost exclusively to those young men who have been schooled at Harrow and Eton and who have graduated from Oxford and Cambridge.

Only 0.1% of all boys go to Eton or Harrow, 30% of all Conservative M.P.s in 1935 were educated at one of these two schools. In a survey of the Diplomatic and Foreign Services, covering the period 1851-1929 it was noted that

“60% of the personnel of these services went to the eleven most exclusive schools....The unchallengeable conclusion that emerges....is that the British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service have been a preserve for the sons of the aristocratic, rentier and professional classes.”

Britain today is a society in which the scales of power and influence are tipped heavily in favour of those who are property owners. In every sphere of life, the impact of the capitalist is all-pervading and decisive. The majority of the judges, the higher clergy of the Established Church, the Commanders of the Armed Forces are all members of this wealthy minority. The mass of the people are excluded from the benefits of the system under which they live and it is to the conditions of life of these masses that we must now turn.

The majority of the British people own no property in the shape of land, capital investments or shareholdings in industry.

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a position to expand its circulation to 500,000 once sufficient paper is made available.

#### SUNDAY PAPERS

Big Business Interests		Progressive	
<b>News of the World</b>	over 4,000,000	<b>Reynolds News</b>	620,000
<b>Sunday Express</b>	2,121,000	<b>Sunday Pictorial</b>	
<b>Sunday Dispatch</b>	1,331,000	(The Sunday edition of	
<b>Sunday Graphic</b>	1,129,000	the Daily Mirror) over 2,000,000	
<b>Sunday Chronicle</b>	482,000		
<b>Sunday Times</b>	465,000		
<b>Empire News</b>	1,782,448		
<b>People</b>	over 3,000,000		

Their personal belongings, clothing and furniture are their own ; normally the house they live in is rented from a landlord. These are the working people of Britain, numbering some 17 million. (This figure excludes wives and children.) These 17 million have only their labour-power to sell in order to provide food and amenities for themselves and their families. The main industries in which the bulk of the working class are to be found are engineering, coal-mining, transport, chemicals, fertilisers and distribution. In 1939, 2½ million workers were employed in engineering, one million in coal-mining, 1½ million in transport, 2 million in building and public works, 2 million in the distributive trades, one million in mining and only three-quarters of a million (7½ lakhs) in agriculture.

A considerable part of the working class is organised into trade unions and political parties—the whole making up what is known as the Labour Movement.

Any account of the standards of living of the working people in Britain is a grim commentary upon the inability of the oldest imperialism to organise for its people work and food for all. The outstanding feature of the 20 years in between the two world wars was the existence of large-scale unemployment, the number of the unemployed never dropping below 1½ million. In 1931-32 the unemployment figures were 3 million. The years after the last war saw the growth of the Depressed Areas ; parts of the country which had formerly been prosperous but which were now unable to find employment for the people who lived there. The coal industry of South Wales and Durham, textiles in Lancashire and shipbuilding in Scotland were some of the industries and areas affected. The successive Conservative Governments left the unemployed to rot and starve in the villages and towns and many were the attempts to reduce the pitifully inadequate 'dole' which was given to the unemployed families.

For those in employment, the average wages earned were between £3 (Rs. 40) and £3.10 (Rs. 46) per week. Skilled workers, for example, in the engineering industry, would earn more than this average. Compared to Indian standards, this is, of course, very high. But we must remember that between Bri-

tain and India there is no basis of comparison in terms of mere wage standards.

The best indication of the insufficiency of the general wage level is given in the figures for health and nutrition. Numerous studies of the health conditions of the British people were made by eminent scientists and doctors in the years before 1939. One of the most reliable was that undertaken by Sir John Orr in 1936. He estimated that one-half of the British population was too poor to maintain an adequate all-round diet. *Nearly one-third of the people were suffering from serious malnutrition.* It is only necessary to add that these figures have never been questioned, either by Government or by private investigators. Others have confirmed Orr's conclusions. An analysis of the standard of living in various industries revealed that 80% of the mining workers lived below the 'poverty line'; in building the percentage was 59; in textiles 40. The unemployed worker and his family always lived below the minimum standard for the maintenance of health and efficiency. The agricultural labourer, prior to 1939, was in most cases little better off than the unemployed worker. His wages were the lowest of any worker, an average of 20 rupees a week, or less than half the average for the industrial workers. 60% of the labourers live in what are known as 'tied' cottages, the property of the landlord which is given on rent when the labourer works for his landlord; if he does not, he also loses his home. The landlord has not been slow to use the threat of the loss of the tied cottage in order to attack trade unionism in the countryside.

Striking evidence of the inability of capitalist society to organise for its workers a decent living standard is the fact that the health of the general mass of the people improved during the war years, in spite of the severest rationing. The abolition of unemployment and the temporary rise in wages during the war years has assured a minimum food distribution to all, although the speeding-up and labour fatigue of wartime production has largely offset the benefits gained.

The picture of Britain today is of a society divided against itself—the owners of property against the majority of the people. The wealth which the people produce by their labour is for the

benefit of the few ; it has been a hard and long fight to establish even the present, inadequate standard of livelihood. With the struggle of the British people to build an equal and just society we must now concern ourselves.

## CHAPTER II

### RISE OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT : 1800-1931

INDUSTRIALISATION DEVELOPED FIRST IN BRITAIN AND THE BRITISH working class were “the first-born sons of modern industry.” They were naturally the pioneers of trade unionism ; and the development, in the 1830s and 40s, of a revolutionary trade unionism and of the political movement of Chartism, was a significant fore-runner to the efforts of men and women in this century to end exploitation and to abolish poverty.

In this brief sketch of the trade union and labour movement from its early beginnings up to the world economic crisis of 1931, four main periods may be distinguished.

1. 1800—1850, a period of revolutionary upsurge, of mass formation of trade unions and of the rise and collapse of the great people’s movement of Chartism.

2. 1850—1880. The working class as an independent force was absent from the political scene. Trade unions became the organisations of the skilled workers. “*Defence not defiance*” was their motto and they were concerned only with securing “*a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work.*” The existing order of society was not seriously questioned and the mass of the working class in political affairs was content to trail in the wake of the Liberal Party.

3. 1880—1918 saw a new upsurge among the trade unions. Unskilled workers began once again to battle against their long exploitation and in this period, socialist ideas became widespread. In 1906 the Labour Party was formed.

4. 1918—1931. The end of the First World War saw

the emergence of the Labour Party as the main rival to the Conservatives. The power and influence of the old Liberal Party, shattered though it was, lingered on to receive its death blow in the 1945 election. This was a period of intensified class struggles, culminating in the general strike of 1926 and it also saw the formation of two minority Labour Governments.

### 1880-1850 : *Revolutionary Upsurge*

Modern capitalism was firmly established in 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. From the middle of the 18th century, there had taken place an agrarian and industrial revolution. By a series of enclosure movements,\* large numbers of the rural population were driven from the land (often by forcible means) and were forced to seek work in the new factories which were springing up all over the country. This process was continued right up to 1850.

Particularly after 1815, the urban population increased very rapidly. Britain, by virtue of her geographical position, naval supremacy and plentiful supply of the raw materials of modern industry, was able to establish an industrial and commercial supremacy which was not effectively challenged until the closing decades of the 19th century. Foreign competition was overwhelmed by the torrent of English-made goods. Indian competition in the textile industry was bludgeoned into ruin by the use of British political supremacy and advanced technique and resources.

The condition of the British people in the period has often been described. Hours of work in the unhygienic factories and

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\***Enclosure Movements** :—Part of the agrarian revolution of the 18th century which led to capitalist farming in Britain. Prior to enclosure, land was held by tenants in widely-scattered holdings. The enclosures were in the majority of cases against the wishes of the small tenant but in the interest of the big landlords. The land in any one area would be declared 'enclosed' and it would be re-allocated in compact plots to all concerned. Violence, bribery and fraud were characteristic features of the movement, and the re-distribution of the land was always carried out under the influence and to the benefit of the squires and wealthy labourers.

mines rose to 16 and even 18 a day. Child labour was employed in all industries, including mines. For children, right down to 1833, the working day was 14 hours. Pauper, mainly orphan, children were forcibly imported from the workhouses to the new industrial areas of Lancashire and the Midlands. By day they were maltreated in the factories and at night they were herded together in insanitary and overcrowded buildings. Deformity among children due to excessive standing was widespread; accidents, because of the failure to fence machinery and, above all, because labour was overworked, were everyday occurrences. No wonder it has been said that the "*unbounded greed of the Lancashire manufacturers.....devoured nine generations in one.*"

Female labour, like child labour was extensively employed because of its cheapness. Especially in the mines, the brutality of the owners was notorious. Women, including those in an advanced state of pregnancy, were used instead of horses and made to pull the tubs of coal along the narrow galleries. "I have worked" said a Scotchwoman in 1842, before a Government Commission, "33 years in the bowels of the earth....A vast number of women have dead children....It is only horse work that ruins the women, it crushes their haunches, bends their ankles and makes them old women at forty."

Housing conditions in the towns were intolerable. To house the workers for the new factories, the employers built "mile upon mile of squalid 'back to back' cottages, crammed close together in narrow courts and blind alleys; with underground cellars occupied indifferently by human beings, animals and stores of cinders and filth." (*Quoted from S. & B. Webb*). Sanitation was non-existent.

In the countryside the Poor Law system, the enclosure movement and the high prices of bread sapped the vitality and strength of the rural population and starvation and poverty were rapidly increasing.

The people, however, were not prepared to accept this state of affairs as natural and inevitable. They fought the repression of their employers and landlords, backed though it was by the whole force of Government. What is remarkable in this period is the high degree of political consciousness and understanding

that the system itself was wrong. The establishment of modern industrial capitalism coincided with a revolt against its injustice and exploitation in the country of its origin. That revolt, in many forms and in different ways, has been carried on, sometimes violently, sometimes by peaceful means, right up to the present day.

For the first quarter of the century, trade unionism was illegal; and the members of the underground organisations ("combinations" as they were called in those days) were, when discovered, savagely dealt with by imprisonment and transportation covered, savagely dealt with by imprisonment and transportation to penal settlements in Australia and elsewhere. Police spying was the rule and in the struggle for elementary organisation, the young working class learnt solidarity and self-reliance.

The 1820s were stormy days and meetings and strikes were broken up with great violence. In 1918 a huge crowd in Manchester, listening to speeches by radical leaders, was suddenly charged by the Cavalry. Eleven were killed and hundreds injured. In Durham a strike of the miners was put down only with the help of the Army. In 1830, a year of great agricultural distress, a great revolt of the agricultural labourers broke out. Beginning in August, in the south of England, the revolt quickly spread westward and as the months went by, assumed a more and more violent character. The brutality of the Government and the landlords corresponded to the seriousness with which they viewed the rising. Nine men were hanged, nearly 500 transported and as many more imprisoned.

Notwithstanding the violence of the Government's repression, a Government in which landlords and the finance-oligarchy predominated, a growth of unions in all trades and industries made slow but steady progress. The movement reached its peak with the formation in 1834 of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union which embraced all workers, in industry and agriculture, skilled and unskilled, women as well as men. In a few weeks the membership grew to half a million, and the workers, feeling their strength, came out all over the country in strikes and demanded radical action from their leaders. This produced an immediate reaction from the Government. At the same time, the working-class leadership was not sufficiently experienced or clear-



sighted to cope with the organisational difficulties involved. As a test case the Government arrested six farm labourers in Dorset (the Tolpuddle Martyrs), hastily tried and sentenced them to seven years' transportation. Their crime was the formation of a trade union for agricultural labourers and although the agitation for their release was a nation-wide affair, Government repression together with the indecision of the trade union leaders, resulted in the fairly rapid collapse of the movement.

There was an important lesson in its failure. In these years up to 1834 the weapon of the general strike had been considered as the end and not the beginning of the struggle. When the movement failed, revolutionary trade unionism alone was seen to be unequal to the task of changing society. The stage was set for the revolutionary political movement of Chartism, with its roots in the mass organisations of the working class.

The strength of the Chartist movement lay in the industrial north, among the textile operatives, the miners and the starving hand workers. The movement was based on the six points of a Charter\* (hence their name) which, as a contemporary observed "were sufficient to overthrow the whole English Constitution, Queen and Lords included." The general historical significance of Chartism is that it showed the British working class as an independent political force by the late 1830s. They were already realising that the main enemy was the industrialist bourgeoisie and the system of capitalism. The Chartist movement failed, it is true ; but it was a glorious failure.

Given the relationship of forces in Britain at the time, it was perhaps inevitable that such a movement was unable to fulfil its objective. The bourgeoisie in the forties of the last century was still a rising class ; its role in history was still, in certain respects, a progressive one. The defeat of Chartism was certainly in part to be explained by the weakness and mistakes of the Chart-

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\*The six points of the Charter were :—

Equal electoral districts.

Abolition of the property qualifications for M.P.s.

Universal manhood suffrage.

Annual Parliaments.

Vote by ballot.

The payment of M.P.s.

ist leadership. But in the context of the historical situation such weaknesses were themselves a result of the "newness and immaturity" of the working class. Capitalism had still a large measure of expansion within its own framework ; and it was able, in the next decades to "buy off" the revolt of its working people with substantial concessions. Indeed, it was precisely the critical situation in which capitalist society found itself in the 'Hungry Forties' which largely contributed to the extraordinary vigour and all-embracing character of the Chartist movement.

After 1850 capitalism was able, for a time at any rate, to solve its crisis ; and the movement of the people turned from revolution to reform. The lessons learnt in those bitter and bloody years have not been forgotten and the whole period is one of tremendous significance in British working-class history.

### 1850—1880 : "*Defence, Not Defiance*"

These years saw an unparalleled expansion of British industry and commerce. The crisis of the 1840s was successfully overcome ; Free Trade and the final removal of all restrictions upon capitalist development gave complete freedom for capital to develop and expand, and the ruling class was able, by a policy of concession and compromise, to turn the opposition of the working class into peaceful organisation within the existing framework of society.

Two major sections of the working class, the skilled workers in the building and engineering industries and the textile operatives of Lancashire, were specially favoured. We have the beginning of the 'labour aristocracy' which has played such an important, and deadening, role in the history of the British working-class movement. Sections of the upper strata of the workers became "respectable" ; no longer was it a question of uprooting the foundations of society, as in the preceding period, but rather of winning "those terms which the best employers were willing voluntarily to grant." Politically the movement formed the left wing of the Liberal Party ; industrially, attempts to organise all embracing unions were abandoned, and trade unions henceforth represented the craft outlook and ideas of the skilled workers.

It would be wrong, however, to underestimate the solid and important achievements of this period. The basis for stable trade unionism was well and truly laid, preparing the framework in which later advances could take place. And although the ideology of the trade union leadership was one of compromise in industrial affairs and liberalism in politics, important battles were fought with the employing class and the State on issues which were vital for the future development of working-class organisation.

First came the fight for the achievement of full legal status for trade unions and the right to organise. This was linked with the second main issue involved, the extension of the franchise. On both these issues, important gains were won although later generations had to fight constantly for the retention and further extension of these democratic rights. In 1867, the vote was given to the working classes in the towns and extended in 1885 to the countryside.

The Ballot Act of 1872 abolished open voting and introduced the secret ballot. During these years trade unions were given a secure legal basis by Parliamentary legislation. The third fight was on the international field, uniting British trade unionists with democratic movements abroad.

Thus the mass of the British people (as opposed to the ruling class) demonstrated in great meetings their solidarity with the cause of the North in the American Civil War,\* although the North's blockade of the Southern cotton areas caused immense hardship to the textile workers of Lancashire. The struggles of the Italian people for a united, democratic Italy and of the Polish people against Tsarist slavery received full support ;

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\*The American Civil War was fought between the rapidly developing industrial bourgeoisie of the North and the reactionary, feudalistic slave-owning landlords of the South. Apart from their natural sympathy for reaction, the British capitalist class supported the South because the South stood for **Free Trade**, i.e., unlimited entry for British manufactured goods, whilst the North, representing the industrial classes, had always campaigned for high tariffs, behind which their own industry might develop. The progressive nature of the fight against feudalism and slavery was quickly appreciated by all radicals and democrats and Marx and Engels, in particular, vigorously espoused the cause of the North.

Garibaldi had a tremendous reception from the people of London ; and, in 1864 the first International Workingmen's Association was founded, with a British trade union leader as its first President.

The 60s saw the consolidation of trade unions first on a local and then on a national scale, and it must not be supposed, in spite of the narrow outlook and 'respectability' of many of the trade union leaders, that strikes and industrial disputes were absent. Any such strikes were, as usual, met with the full force of the State authority ; and, in every instance, the unity of the Government with the employers and the landlords was unmis-takable.

There is one other development in this period which must be considered. Co-operative societies\* had a long history ; the early ones were mainly attempts to provide cheap flour and to break the monopoly of the millers. Scores of societies rose in the thirties, only to go bankrupt. In 1844, with the establishment of the Rochdale pioneers of a 'New Model' Co-operative, the permanent basis was laid for what has become a great people's organisation. In the co-operative movement, says a working class historian, "thousands of workers have learnt how to organise and administer large-scale business enterprise and have demonstrated conclusively that ability to do so is not confined to the capitalist class."

Our period ends with crisis in British capitalism far more severe than that of the 1840s. The way out was found in the development of an aggressive imperialism ; and in the transitional period, mass unemployment and a worsening of the standard of living of the mass of the people undermined the basis of 'respectable' trade unionism.† There began a new upsurge

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\*The co-operatives were organisations of the workers to buy the necessities of life and re-sell them to their members at reasonable prices. Profits were re-distributed among the total membership of the co-operative in the form of a 'dividend,' and this is still the principle of the co-operative movement today.

†In any period of economic crisis, the skilled worker is just as much affected as the unskilled by unemployment and the "privileges" and "concessions" which capitalism gives to its skilled workers are seen to be only temporary phenomena. When profits decrease—

among the unskilled, and in the closing decades of the century arose the foundations of an independent workers' party.

1880—1918 : *Spread of Socialist Ideas*

The monopoly of Britain was decisively challenged in these years. Germany, and later America, became great industrial nations, and competed with Britain on the world market. This period was one of intense commercial rivalry and British capitalism was forced to turn to imperialist exploitation in order to maintain a position of privilege and monopoly profit. The battle between Britain and Germany was fought with increasing bitterness and led, in 1914-18, to an armed conflict for the re-distribution of the world's colonies and the right to an unlimited exploitation of colonial peoples, their labour and their raw materials.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the undermining of Britain's monopoly position resulted in a deep social crisis in British society. Unemployment in the major industries and the resulting widespread poverty produced a new militancy among the trade unions and a revival of socialist thought and organisation. These two parallel movements, interconnected and inter-acting as they were, nevertheless kept to their separate paths, and it is one of the tragedies of the British labour movement, still making itself felt today, that the early growth of socialism in Britain remained to some extent independent of the trade union movement.

For this divorce of theory and practice the Labour movement has paid dearly. The ideas of the "respectable" trade unionists were carried over into an age where the objective situation had completely changed. The various groups of "socialists" remained on the whole aloof from the trade unions, and even the most brilliant among the new trade union leaders became infected with the opportunism and attitude of compromise of the older officials. The ideology of the "labour aristocracy" acted as a powerful dampener upon the new militant organisations which arose.

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as they do in times of crisis—the wages of all workers, skilled and unskilled, are the first to be attacked by the employers.

The new unionism, however, in spite of its lack of political clarity, did mark a great advance. For the first time since the days of the Chartists, the unskilled were successfully organised and the advances in trade union experience in the intervening years meant that these advances could be consolidated on a lasting basis. In 1888 and 1889 occurred two strikes which completely broke with the deadening tradition of narrow 'craft' unionism based on the organisation of the privileged, skilled workers.

First, the girls in the East End of London, employed in the match industry, electrified the whole country by a successful strike. This was followed by the gas-workers, hitherto unorganised, who forced their employers both to reduce hours of work (from 12 to 8) and to raise wages. But the event which really showed the strength of the new latent forces among the working classes was the great Dock Strike of 1889. The Port of London was completely paralysed; support for the strikers went far beyond Britain, £30,000 (about Rs. 4 lakhs) being subscribed to the strike fund by workers in Australia.

The next year saw 200,000 unskilled workers organised into the unions, and these new unionists came with no illusions about the eternity or inevitability of the capitalist system. Here is what a great contemporary wrote in 1890 :

"These unskilled are very different from the fossilised brothers of the old trade unions; not a trace of the old formalist spirit, of the craft exclusiveness of the engineers, for instance; on the contrary, a general cry for the organisation of all trade unions in one fraternity and for a direct struggle against capital."

As was to be expected, the employers immediately fought back against the challenge of the new unionism. A second dockers' strike in 1893 was defeated; the engineering employers successfully locked out their workers until the unions agreed to their demands; the familiar story of Government intervention against the strikers and their unions was often repeated; coal-miners on strike in Yorkshire were fired on by troops and several killed;

the courts backed the Government by their decisions against picketing and the boycott of non-union firms. The employers banded together in a Federation and subsidised strike-breaking agencies. The democratic pretensions of the Conservative and Liberal Parties were soon exposed when the profits of the property owners were threatened.

These new developments among the trade unions and the growing strength of the various socialist organisations led to the demand for the formation of an independent workers' party. Throughout the 1890s, persistent attempts by socialist delegates to the Trade Union Congress were made to establish a Parliamentary fund. In 1893 the Independent Labour Party (ILP) had been formed, but owing to sectarianism of the existing socialist bodies, the leadership of the new party soon fell into the hands of the Fabians (who are gradualist socialists) and of disguised Liberals, such as Ramsay MacDonald. In 1900, a Labour Representation Committee was set up, with support from some 500,000 trade unionists and in 1906 the Labour Party was constituted, returning a group of 29 Labour members to the House of Commons in an election held in that year.

Many years had elapsed since the great revolutionary movements of 1830 and 1840. The independent working-class party, based on the organisations of the workers in the trade unions, had not been achieved without great efforts and sacrifice. Bitter disillusionment there had often been and many were the setbacks. The ruling class in Britain had a long experience in dealing with the demands of its people. As in India, compromise and repression went hand in hand ; compromise in order to stave off revolt, repression when it was a question of the fundamentals of their privileged position being threatened.

At every stage, the working class had to fight for their democratic rights : no advance was realised, neither in the industrial nor in the political field, without overcoming the opposition of the capitalists or the landlords. It so happened that due to Britain's industrial monopoly in the nineteenth century and the later imperialist exploitation the bourgeoisie could afford to buy off the working class with concessions and an extension of demo-

cratic rights.\*

So long as the national and international position of the British imperialists were assured, they were prepared to grant the demands of the working class so long as those demands did not infringe their ownership of property and their right to profit without serious limitation. Once the fundamentals of society were challenged, the opposition of the imperialists became uncompromising and unyielding.

From 1906, until the outbreak of the war in 1914, both the unions and the Labour Party made rapid progress. The socialist element in the Labour Party developed but was unable to influence in any decisive way the old leadership. On almost all questions, this leadership was content to follow the Liberal Party. The theory of class collaboration (which holds that the Labour movement can achieve its aims within the framework of existing capitalist society) was implicit in their actions and men like MacDonald and Snowden were to lead the Labour Party into those disastrous policies which culminated in the 1931 catastrophe.

The history of the Labour Party in Britain cannot be understood until the conditions out of which the Party grew are appre-

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\* This "buying off" of the workers with the profits of industrial monopoly and colonial exploitation has had very important consequences for the Labour movement right down to the present day. The ideas of the Labour aristocracy not only repudiated a policy of militant struggle inside Britain in relation to the conflict between British capitalists and British workers but in the international and especially in the colonial field, the Labour aristocracy found themselves in complete agreement with the imperialists.

It must be emphasised that the progressive forces in the Labour movement have been much weaker in combating the practice of class collaborators in imperial affairs than in the internal situation in Britain. The Labour leadership right down to the present day has been, on the whole, able to carry the majority of the British working class with it in its pro-imperialist approach to the problems of India and the colonial countries in general.

Only with the development of the Communist Party, which has always followed a consistently anti-imperialist policy, has the opposition to class collaboration in imperial affairs become vocal and at all organised. Even today, the necessity for a whole-hearted anti-imperialist programme is much less clearly understood among the rank and file than the need for a militant policy against the capitalists in Britain.



ciated. The men who were at the head of the Party from the time of its formation were left-wing Liberals, to whom socialist theory and practice were wholly repugnant. The impact of the Labour aristocracy in its counsels has been of tremendous importance, and the history of the Party has been one of continual struggle between the militancy of the rank and file and the conservatism of the leadership. From its inception, the Party has been fighting not only its class enemy, but has been engaged in a never-ending struggle over policy and leadership.

The years up to 1914 showed these tendencies very clearly. Especially from 1910, they were years of tremendous struggles. Membership of unions rose from 2.5 millions to 4 millions. The cleavage between the reformism of the Labour Party leadership and the militancy and revolutionary vigour of the rank and file unionists was more clearly marked than ever. Syndicalism, which disclaimed political activity and emphasised the weapon of general strike, rapidly gained ground. Its leading exponent was the famous leader of the 1889 Dockers' Strike, Tom Mann, who was later to become a foundation member of the British Communist Party.

1912 saw the first national miners' strike, and union membership rose, in one year, from 160,000 to over 900,000. Transport workers, dockers and engineers were all on the move. "The most salient feature of this turmoil" wrote a capitalist newspaper in 1913, "is the general spirit of revolt, not only against employers of all kinds, but also against leaders and majorities, and Parliamentary or any kind of constitutional and orderly action."

In 1914, arising out of the struggles of the previous years, was formed the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, pledged to support, by all means, including strike action, each other's demands. A general strike was certain and only the outbreak of the Imperialist War in August 1914 prevented its declaration.

The First World War ushered in an entirely new period in British working-class history. The Labour Party and trade union leaderships surrendered completely to the ruling class. Union officials became "*part of the social machinery of the State.*" The

workers were left bewildered and confused by this capitulation of their recognised leaders. Only gradually did they begin to make their weight felt once again and one of the remarkable achievements of war-time labour history was the progress and development of the shop stewards movement, an organisation of the rank and file.

The shop stewards derive their name from the union representatives, or stewards in each factory. Especially strong were their organisations in the engineering industries. Clydeside, in Scotland, was a major storm centre. In 1915, a gigantic strike movement led to the formation of the Clyde Workers Committee, representing the mass of the workers in the engineering works and the shipyards. Their avowed object was

*“to organise the workers upon class basis, and to maintain the class struggle until the overthrow of the wages system, the freedom of the workers and the establishment of industrial democracy have been attained.”*

At first the strikes were non-political, concentrated upon economic issues. Later, in the struggle against conscription and even more after the 1917 Russian Revolution, strikes became more and more political in character. Many of the leaders were from the start avowed revolutionaries and anti-militarists. By the time the Armistice came, the unrest was assuming tremendous proportions and the demand for radical change was receiving support from all sections of the movement. The rank and file were seriously challenging the position of the official leadership.

Had this leadership pursued a policy not of collaboration but of opposition to the ruling class, the whole course of British history would have been changed. But as so often in the modern history of the Labour movement, the leaders sidetracked the militancy of their members, preferring methods of compromise and even of betrayal. The ideology and practice of the Labour aristocracy once again defeated the hopes and desires of the people.

### 1918—1931 : *The World Crisis*

The end of the First World War found British capitalism again in crisis—and this time there was no way out. Not only

in Soviet Russia, but all over Europe revolutionary movements arose, determined to build a new society. Even in Britain, hitherto the most bourgeois of all countries, there was a profound discontent and a militancy only paralleled by the Chartist days and the years just preceding the outbreak of war. The Labour Party, for the first time, assumed at least formally a definite socialist aim and programme. The British Communist Party was established in 1920.

The existence of a revolutionary party in the most imperialist of all countries was of tremendous significance. From the first the Communist Party sharply differentiated itself from all other groups and parties by fighting with all its resources against the oppression and exploitation of the colonial countries. The election of Saklatvala in 1924 as Communist M.P. for the working-class constituency of Battersea was symbolic of the unity between the British Communists and the liberation movements of the oppressed countries. Not only in words but in deed was established the solidarity between the vanguard of the British Labour movement and the oppressed peoples of the colonial countries, and for the first time in British Labour history an organised party, the Communist Party, sought to win the whole movement for a repudiation of the policy of unity with the imperialists in matters of empire.

The war had appeared to strengthen the power of the monopolists. Great combinations of capital had been formed, united in the Federation of British Industries, comprising all the big industrialists. But the post-war boom was of very short duration and by 1922 the unemployment figures had risen to over 2 million. In no part of the world was the power of imperialism unchallenged—India was in ferment, China in revolutionary crisis, whilst the home country was convulsed with strikes and threats of direct action.

In 1920 the incident of the 'Jolly George' had aroused the enthusiasm of the whole Labour movement. Dockers had refused to load a boat destined to carry arms to be used against the young Soviet State. Councils of Action were set up and the Labour movement threatened the Government with a general strike if war was declared against the Soviet Union. The six

and half million trade unionists were united against the counter-revolution and cried halt to the plans of the imperialists. There was no war with Russia.

The years up to 1926 were years of revolutionary turmoil, strikes on a hitherto unprecedented scale took place and there was a rapid growth of socialist and Communist ideas and organisation. In 1919, the whole of Clydeside came out on a three weeks' strike demanding the 40-hour week. This same year even saw a police strike. 1920 saw the most complete stoppage in the coal industry ever recorded. 1921—dockers, railway workers, engineers were all involved. Right up to the year of the General Strike, millions of trade unionists showed their militancy and solidarity against the employing class.

The struggles were directed not only against the capitalists, but also against the policy of reformism which came to be associated with the name of MacDonald. The leadership, both of the trade unions and of the Labour Party, were at bottom afraid of the militant forces under their control. And with the great betrayal of the General Strike—the high water-mark of these years—the leadership's policy of collaboration and compromise won all along the line.

The General Strike arose out of support to the mineworkers who had long been one of the worst exploited sections of the Labour movement. The reactionary nature of the coal-owners was notorious, and the Trade Union Congress decided upon action of the whole movement in order to force the Government to grant the just demands of the miners. The Conservative Government of course stood solid with the coal-owners.

When the strike was called on May 3rd 1926, the response was beyond all expectations (at least of the T.U.C. leadership). The stoppage of work in the country was complete; the solidarity of the people was of the highest order. "A vast army" wrote a commentator, "had entered battle with incomparable *elan*; but at its head stood generals anxious above all to avoid decisions, fearful of victory, concerned to bring the war to an end on any terms."

MacDonald told the House of Commons that "with the discussion of general strikes and Bolshevism and all that sort of

thing I have nothing to do at all." (MacDonald at this time was leader of the Labour Party.) J. H. Thomas, a prominent member of the General Council of the T.U.C., frankly said, "I have never favoured the principle of the general strike."

This attitude of the leaders could only result in one thing—betrayal. The Government made a great show of force. The Army and Navy were employed to the full; the police were reinforced. Baton charges were frequent and the whole apparatus of the law was employed to intimidate and coerce. There has never been any suggestion that the strike was weakening; on the contrary, on the last day of the strike the number of strikers was increasing. But on the 10th day the strike was suddenly terminated, after hasty negotiations between the T.U.C. and the Government. No agreement was reached on behalf of the miners in support of whom the strike had begun; it was unconditional surrender of whom the strike had begun; it was unconditional surrender to the ruling class and the miners found themselves alone.

The rage and indignation of the whole movement can be well imagined, but without a leadership they were powerless. Only one man, the miners' leader, voted against the General Council's decision and the mine-workers carried on the lone fight until December. There never was a more shameful capitulation in the history of the British Labour movement. The lesson is still being learnt today.

The betrayal of the General Strike began a period of blatant and open collaboration with the employers, only broken by the 1931 disaster. The second Labour Government, elected in 1929, depended upon the now greatly reduced Liberal Party for a majority in the House of Commons. Election pledges were not honoured; wage cuts were initiated by Government arbitration and the whole miserable farce of the second Labour Government was blown up by the profound economic crisis through which capitalism was passing.

1929 had seen the collapse in America and unemployment and depression quickly spread over the whole world. Faced with the problems arising out of capitalist crisis, MacDonald and his colleagues showed themselves utterly incompetent. The

Government were beaten into panic by the financiers and MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas, the three most famous leaders of the Labour Party, went over to the Conservatives and formed with them a National Government.

The betrayal of 1926 had been followed by the betrayal of the political leaders. The two tendencies within the Labour movement were never more clearly demonstrated—collaboration and compromise with capitalism or revolutionary theory and practice and the building of a socialist state. Since the time of Chartism, the leadership of the Trade Unions had always been in the hands of the compromisers. Ultimate control had remained with the Labour aristocracy, although the objective basis of that aristocracy had gone for ever with the outbreak of World War I.

Henceforth British imperialism was to be in a state of permanent crisis, completely unable to solve its own problems and contradictions. MacDonaldism, which put the fight against the militants in the rank and file first, had materially contributed to the maintenance of the existing structure of society. When the crisis deepened, MacDonald and the others made an easy transition into the ranks of the ruling class.

It was not only in internal affairs that MacDonaldism proved disastrous. Even more blatant was its practice of following imperialist tradition in world affairs. In the colonial countries and in particular in India, the hopes which the advent of a Labour Government aroused were soon dispelled. Thus in 1924, the Labour Under-Secretary for Air announced that "We have not made any change in the policy of the late (i.e. Conservative) Government in Iraq," and aerial bombardment of the tribesmen continued. In India, the Bengal Ordinances were decreed; troops were called out in the Bombay Cotton Mills Strike and at Cawnpore Indian Communists were put on trial for "conspiracy." In Mexico, a Labour Government was harshly attacked by MacDonald for suggesting that a wealthy English ranch-owner and resident in the country was subject to Mexican laws.

In 1929 the procedure was repeated. In March 1929 the Government of India had arrested all the principal working-class leaders and brought them to trial at Meerut. In June the second

Labour Government assumed office, but it made not the slightest difference. Indeed the Labour Government went out of its way to emphasise its responsibility. *The Daily Herald*, organ of the Labour Party, wrote that "The machinery of the law must operate." In no instance, did the Labour Government depart from the accepted policy, in foreign or imperial affairs, laid down by previous Conservative Governments. The whole colonial tradition of repression, absence of civil liberties and economic exploitation was continued and supported by the so-called socialist leaders.

The spirit of the mass of the Labour movement in relation to the necessity for a radical policy in internal affairs was never in question in the post-war years. On them and their families fell the burden of sacrifice in times of strike and political action. All that they had asked of their leaders was honesty and sincerity and a belief in the injustice of capitalism as strong as their own. But the leaders betrayed them.

Up to the collapse of 1931, the militancy of the people had never found a response in their leaders. The rank and file had never been able to build an organisation which, from top to bottom, was in harmony with their declared aims and objects. This was the main problem to be faced in the years after 1931—the problem of making effective the progressive ideas of the common man.

That the common man was becoming dissatisfied with the system of capitalism was evident. Many illusions *had* been shattered in the post-war period but the process of wholehearted repudiation of the ideas of the Labour aristocracy had by no means been completed. Especially in colonial affairs and the whole problem of imperialist exploitation, recognition of the unity between the capitalist at home and the colonial exploiter abroad was still confined to a minority of the Labour movement. The problem for the British Labour movement was to effect a complete break with the practice of class collaboration both at home and in the colonies. How to make the ideas of the progressives, grouped around the Communists, effective in trade union action and policy was the task in the years following 1931. It is still the problem today.

## THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM : 1931-39

THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS WHICH BEGAN IN AMERICA IN 1929 and quickly spread over the whole world was the most devastating in the history of capitalism. Between 1929 and 1932 world industrial production fell by nearly 50 per cent ; the inability of capitalism to solve its own problems was emphasised by the example of the Soviet Union, the only socialist state, whose production in the same period nearly doubled.

In 1933 Stalin was able to report that Soviet production was three times the level of pre-war Russia and double the level of 1928, while in the same year American industrial production was 84 per cent of pre-war and 56 per cent of 1928. The British figures were 75 per cent of pre-war and 80 per cent of 1928. America's share in world production dropped from 45 per cent in 1928 to 34 per cent in 1932, whilst that of the Soviet Union, in the same years rose from 5 per cent to 15 per cent.

World unemployment (outside the U.S.S.R. which had successfully abolished unemployment by 1933) was estimated to be between 30 to 50 millions in the worst years of the depression. In Britain, the number of unemployed, 1½ million in 1929, went up to 1¾ million in 1930 and to nearly 3 million by the autumn of 1931. Not until July 1935 did the figure drop below 2 million, and right up to the outbreak of war in 1939 there were never less than 1½ million men and women out of work.

Fascism dominated world politics after 1931. The ruling class, seeking a way out of its insoluble contradictions, resorted to open terrorist dictatorship in those countries where the existence of the capitalist system could no longer be guaranteed by "democratic" methods. The rise of Fascism in Germany signalled a new epoch in the world situation. In all countries the ruling classes were brought clearly and sharply against the ag-



gressive imperialisms of Germany, Italy and Japan. The Labour movements everywhere recognised the great dangers of Fascism to the working-class parties and they sought to oppose the new barbarism by a closing of their ranks and the organisation of the widest possible unity.

In Britain the salient characteristics of the period were :

1. *The open support which the capitalists gave to the German-Italian-Japanese Axis in the preparations for a new world war.*

The driving impulse behind this support was the never-ceasing opposition to the Soviet Union which formed the one consistent line of policy pursued by the British ruling class since 1917.

In 1932 Japanese aggression in Manchuria received encouragement from the British Government. Sir John Simon (to whom India needs no introduction) appeared as the special pleader for Japan at the League of Nations and refused the offer from the United States for joint opposition to Jap aggression.

In 1935 the Anglo-German Naval Treaty gave direct British support for German re-armament. The treaty included a special clause which allowed Germany to build submarines up to 100 per cent of the British level. The same year Italy was able to flaunt her conquest of Abyssinia in the face of the League of Nations, in which Britain was the most powerful member.

In 1936 Chamberlain adopted a policy of neutrality towards the Spanish struggle, although the participation of German and Italian Fascism in the Civil War on the side of Franco was open and unashamed.

The culminating point in the 'appeasement' policy of the 1930s was reached at Munich where the British imperialists, refusing a united front with the Soviet Union, delivered Czechoslovakia, the bastion of democracy and anti-Fascism in Central Europe, to the German Fascists. The Fascist powers were supported and encouraged in a desperate attempt to turn their war machine against the Soviet Union.

2. *The growth of a Fascist Party in Britain itself, financed by the most reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie and side by*

*side with this open Fascism, a more subtle and much more dangerous policy of whittling away democratic rights and liberties.*

In 1927 had been passed the Trades Disputes and Trade Unions Acts, in which the general strike had been made illegal; Civil Service Unions were forbidden to affiliate to the T.U.C or the Labour Party; mass picketing was forbidden; union funds were made liable to civil action; it was, in other words, "a crudely framed piece of restrictive class legislation" and an American historian has stated that it was "the most reactionary sample of British Labour legislation placed on the statute book since the evil Combination Laws of 1799-1800."

The Incitement to Disaffection Act, passed in 1934 had effected, according to an Oxford Law Professor, "a complete reversal of the accepted principle of English Law." The police force was reorganised and made attractive to middle-class young men who, it was hoped would be more unsympathetic to the working class than the old-fashioned police constable who was himself of working-class origin. By 1938, the National Council of Civil Liberties found that three-quarters of their time was occupied with watching the police and exposing police misconduct.

The radical and progressive Press was more and more confined by the operation of the law of libel. The radio monopoly, the B.B.C., has never allowed a discussion of progressive politics at the microphone. The cinema has an over-riding body of censors, subject to neither public control nor inquiry, which has consistently followed a most prejudiced and reactionary policy.

*3. In the Labour movement a continuous struggle between the reactionary leadership and the efforts of the progressive rank and file to win the whole movement for a repudiation of the tactics of class collaboration and compromise.*

This period sees the consolidation of the power of the trade union bureaucrats and the continued development of the highly centralised trade union organisation in which the permanent officials, more and more out of touch with the ideas and ideals of the mass of the members, dominate union policy and strategy. Personal corruption in the narrow sense is almost wholly absent from the trade union movement in Britain; corruption by capital-

ist ideas and practice is universal. The long domination of the ideology of the Labour aristocracy, whose basic assumption is the harmony between capitalism and its workers, still persists unmodified and is indeed strengthened.

Even more important, for world politics as a whole is the unity between the imperialists and the Labour leadership on the colonial question. Since a decisive break with imperialist traditions requires a revolutionary theory and practice, the Labour leadership, relying upon their liberal ideology, found themselves in complete harmony with the imperialists on all problems concerning India and the other oppressed countries. In domestic and home affairs, the issues of wages, unemployment, capitalist exploitation is reasonably straightforward ; such that could be understood by the most backward worker. But in the realm of colonial affairs, the infection by imperialist ideology of not only the leadership but of large sections of the Labour movement was widespread.

Nearly all the leading bureaucrats of both the Labour Party and the trade union movement began their industrial and political career as militants, reflecting closely the militancy of the common man and woman. Long service in the bureaucratic machine blunted their militancy ; gradually they became part of the social system and in these later years their main energies have been diverted, not against capitalism or its representatives but against the growing demand for a more forward and uncompromising policy—a policy of class struggle, as against a policy of class compromise.

The other side of the picture is the slow but steady growth of the progressive forces, reflected in the growth of the Communist Party. The Communist Party, of course, by no means represents the whole of the progressive forces. The outstanding feature of this whole period is the development among wide sections of the Labour movement of a solid body of progressive and socialist opinion which seeks to change the existing line up of the Labour leadership with the ruling class. But the Communist Party, since 1931 has become increasingly the focus for this progressive opposition and its own establishment and growth represents for the first time in British Labour history, the long

struggle of the people to achieve an organisation and a leadership impossible to corrupt and incapable of betrayal.

The significance of the existence of a strong and flourishing revolutionary party in the traditional home of imperialism must not be underestimated; the mass of the people, despite their long industrial militancy have come only very slowly to accept the need for a revolutionary party of the working class. This acceptance has only arisen as a result of bitter disillusionment with the tactics and methods of their accepted leaders; it has not been easy to break with the deadweight of tradition; the process has been a painful one and has required shedding of the ideas and illusions of a life-time.

Nor must this growth be overestimated. Only in the last 10 years has this movement of progressive forces been able, on a national scale, to influence the Labour movement and it is still in a minority. The war years, in particular, have accelerated to a tremendous degree this development of revolutionary and democratic forces; the long struggle against Fascism has resulted in considerable though not yet decisive changes within the whole Labour movement.

In Imperial affairs the influence of the Communist Party has been even more important. From 1920, when Harry Pollitt gave the call for struggle against intervention in the affairs of the Soviet Union, the Communists have been consistently and continually fighting the widespread and insidious influence of the imperialists in the Labour movement in relation to the colonial affairs. Jawaharlal Nehru has borne testimony, in his autobiography, to the leading part which Communists of all countries played in the establishment and the work of the League Against Imperialism. Saklatvala (now dead), George Allison, Ben Bradley, Rajni Palme Dutt are some of the outstanding figures of the British Communist Party whose work on behalf of the oppressed peoples of India and the other colonial countries is acknowledged by all.

Today, in 1945, the leadership of the Communist Party is a national leadership, drawing around it all the wider progressive forces; for the first time the British working class has a political organisation able to integrate the short-run objectives with the long-term perspective of a fully developed socialist society;

an organisation which is proof against the defeatism so common in working-class history in the face of temporary defeats or set-backs ; a party which sees the industrial and political problem as a whole and which works as an integrated unit both in the industrial field and in the wider political life of the country.

That is the situation today ; the history since 1931 is largely an essay in the struggle between these two tendencies, class compromise or class struggle. That struggle is by no means finished ; with the advent of the Labour majority Government it has indeed been raised to a higher, and almost certainly, more violent level.

#### *4. The entry of the middle classes into the political life of the nation.*

In the discussion in the earlier part of this pamphlet of the class basis of British society, the middle classes were not mentioned. The omission was deliberate, not because the middle strata in England are unimportant, but in order to emphasise the two main classes which in any capitalist society stand in fundamental opposition to each other. In Britain, because capitalism has developed into a highly parasitic imperialism, there have been brought into existence important groups of technicians and administrators, "the managerial class," who occupy the leading positions in industrial and financial management.

Three main groups may be distinguished within the broad stratum of the middle class. Firstly, there are those who own independent businesses—shopkeepers and farmers, merchants and industrialists on a small scale. Within this grouping, the economic and social position varies considerably. The small shopkeeper, for example, is very close to the working class, both in income and ideology. He is facing increasing competition from the large-scale retail organisations, whose growth has been a marked feature of the whole period from the end of World War I. The small-scale capitalist, too, is being squeezed out by the big monopolists, although his economic and social position is much nearer that of the big capitalist than of the working class.

The second main group compose the professional people, the doctors, lawyers, architects, teachers and so on. And lastly,

we have the salaried people who fill the intermediate positions in business, commerce, and the civil service. All these groups form, with their families, about one-tenth of the total population.

The middle classes as a whole have been greatly affected by the related problem of economic crisis and the threat of war. With the onset of the world depression in 1929-33, the middle classes in Britain were faced, for the first time, with loss of economic security and the possibility of unemployment. Serious unemployment did, in fact, appear among certain of the professions ; the livelihood of the small shop-keeper was undermined by the mass unemployment of the workers upon whose support he depended ; the salaried classes found themselves confronted with a 10 per cent income reduction as a result of the "economy" measures undertaken after 1931.

The growth of Fascism and anti-democratic tendencies both at home and abroad helped in the process of reconsideration of their position in society which the middle classes were undertaking as a result of the impact of economic crisis. The realisation that the middle class had no independent existence in capitalist society and that capitalist society itself was dying, became more widely understood than ever before. We have therefore, the beginnings of co-operation with working-class organisations in this period, based on the recognition that only if the middle class allied itself with the main progressive force in society was there any hope for the future.

The development of a left-wing movement in British universities illustrates very clearly these new trends. Before 1931 the University Labour Federations in the colleges and universities were little more than debating societies representing only a portion of the students ; in 1926 the overwhelming majority of both students and lecturers had supported the Government in the General Strike and in many cases had acted as strike-breakers and black-legs. The situation in the colleges radically changed after 1931 ; symptomatic was the presence of 110 delegates from student societies at a national anti-war congress in 1933. In 1935 the Communist and Socialist students united to form the University Labour Federation, henceforth to be the strongest student organi-

sation in the whole country, with 6,000 members out of a total of about 50,000 university students.

The growth of Marxist thought in the universities kept pace with these new developments ; whereas before 1931, Marxism had been completely ignored in British academic circles, in the thirties increasing numbers of top-ranking scientists and academicians began to study and accept Marxist philosophy and the principles of dialectical materialism. Representative of this new trend were the scientists J. D. Bernal, Joseph Needham and J. B. S. Haldane, classical scholars like Prof. Benjamin Farrington and George Thomson, economists of the calibre of Maurice Dobb and Eric Roll.

The scientists and professional people found themselves increasingly frustrated under the existing order. The paradox of poverty amidst plenty forced itself very clearly upon their minds and as scientists and social workers their work was increasingly hampered by the chaotic planlessness of the capitalist system. Their researches were prostituted in the interests of a greater profit for the ruling class regardless of the social consequences involved.

In these years were formed many organisations and societies whose object was the safeguarding of professional standards. The Association of Scientific Workers (now affiliated to the Trades Union Congress) is composed of the majority of scientific academicians and technical workers including the biggest scientists like Haldane, Chadwick, Bernal, Blackett, Needham, etc. ; it has today (in 1945) a membership of 17,000 and is taking a more and more prominent part in all discussions of the role of scientific research and the relations between scientists and society. Many, the Socialist Medical Association, for example, frankly emphasised the impossibility of further progress given the continued existence of capitalist society.

These new developments among the middle classes received a great impetus with the founding of the Left Book Club, one of the most significant events in the history of this period. Intended as a means whereby socialist and progressive literature could be distributed at very cheap prices, it soon developed far beyond its original aim. The Left Book Club became a rallying point

for Socialists, Communists and Demócrats in general and for middle classes in particular. It performed the extremely useful and necessary function of bringing middle-class progressives into contact with the main stream of the Labour movement. By 1938 the Left Book Club had 60,000 members.

Some of the greatest demonstrations and meetings of these years were organised under its auspices and in nearly every town and village, and within every profession and trade, groups of like-minded people came together to discuss political affairs to work out a common plan of action. On issues such as Spain, to be discussed more fully below, the Left Book Club took the initiative when the official Labour leadership was still content to trail miserably in support of the Conservative Government.

This great ferment among the middle classes has resulted in the bridging of the gulf between these classes and the working people. The co-operation between the two has been further strengthened as a result of the war and the victory of the Labour Party in the great election of 1945 was, in large part, the fruit of the unity achieved in the previous years.

The fight for unity within the Labour movement in fact runs like a red thread throughout the history of these years. On every single issue which confronted the Labour movement—the fight against Fascism, Spain, unemployment, the struggle for a People's Front, alliance with the Soviet Union—on all these the Labour leadership took up a position completely opposed to that adopted by the Communist Party and the wider progressive forces of the left. And in spite of the growing strength of the left forces, the reactionary leadership was still strong enough to ensure that its own line of compromise was carried through.

The main internal problem for the Labour movement in the thirties was the political problem of uniting all the Labour and progressive forces on a common platform of unyielding opposition to the monopoly-capitalist, represented by the so-called National Government. The root of the question was working-class unity. To achieve that unity in Britain, the Communist Party has applied for affiliation to the Labour Party.

Trade Union and the Socialist and Communist movements the world over had been deeply impressed—if that is not too mild



a term—by the victory of Fascism in Germany. Both the Socialists and Communists in Germany had built up powerful working-class organisations, but because of disunity against the common enemy, and the class collaborationist policy of German Social Democracy, Fascism was able to achieve its terrorist dictatorship. All over the world the working class realised that the answer to the counter-revolution of the bourgeoisie could only lie in unity, first of the working class and then of all democratic parties and organisations.

This unity was not simply a formal question—it could only be a unity based on a clear-cut policy of struggle against Fascism, both at home and abroad, and against those capitalist parties and organisations (such as the British Conservative Party) which actively supported the Fascist powers. The wide sections of the rank and file trade unionists and Labourites who worked for the unity of the Communist and Labour Parties, recognised that it was not simply a question of adding the small membership of the Communist Party (about 8,000 in 1935 and 20,000 in 1939) to the hundreds of thousands in the Labour Party; of course the individual membership of the Labour Party was mainly a paper one, active only in times of election, whereas every member of the Communist Party was continually engaged in the day to day political and industrial work of the Labour movement.

The basic question was one of policy—was the Labour Party to continue the line of reformism and of compromise which had led to such disastrous results in the past or was it to make a decisive break with the past and initiate the widest possible struggle against the friends of Fascism at home and the Fascist dictatorships abroad? The latter would have resulted had working-class unity been affected; and of course the Labour leadership saw this very clearly. They opposed unity precisely because unity meant a reversal of their traditional policies. And as the ordinary members of the Labour movement began to insist more and more strongly upon militant and radical action, the Labour leadership grew correspondingly more and more bitter against the Communist Party, the organised expression of this militant and radical section.

The struggle of the unemployed in the years following 1931

illustrated these tendencies very clearly. In the earlier years of the thirties, the Communist Party was predominantly a party of the unemployed. There were many reasons for this ; partly the deliberate policy of the trade union leadership had forced Communists out of the unions, partly it was a result of mistakes committed by the Communists themselves. (These mistakes, it should be noted, were quickly overcome from about 1933 onwards, but the great strength of the Communist Party among the industrial workers has only taken root during the war years.)

In the early thirties, the Communist Party was the only section of the Labour movement which fought consistently for the unemployed worker. The National Unemployed Workers Movement (N.U.W.M.) was led by Communists, among whom Wal Hannington was outstanding. The main struggles of the N.U.W.M. were first against the cuts in unemployment relief (the 'dole') which had been instituted in 1931 and then for an increase in the basic scales of payment made.

Under the auspices of the N.U.W.M. 'Hunger Marches' of the unemployed were organised in all parts of the country. In the Welsh mining villages, in Glasgow, Lancashire, the Midlands, London, the story was always the same. Great crowds of the unemployed demonstrated against their starvation conditions and always the police intervened, often in a most brutal manner. In October 1932, 80,000 unemployed in Manchester, the heart of the textile industry, were engaged in a battle with the police, lasting for several hours, both mounted and foot. Five hoses poured tons of water into the crowd in an effort to disperse them. The mounted police repeatedly charged with their sword batons, clubbing down old and young.

At the end of October, a hundred thousand Londoners gathered to welcome Hunger Marchers from all over the country. For several days, there were large-scale fights between the police and the unemployed contingents, and in an attempt to behead the movement, Hannington and certain of his colleagues were arrested and imprisoned.

In all these struggles, the Trade Union and Labour Party leadership took no part ; indeed all members of Labour Party organisations were *specifically forbidden* to associate themselves

with the Communists. At this time 3,000,000 of the working class were unemployed; the struggle against their wretched conditions and the complete inadequacy of their unemployment benefits was ignored by the Labour leadership on the grounds that the main movement of the unemployed was led by Communists. Delegations of unemployed workers were refused admission to the Trade Union Congress, the main opposition coming from Sir Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the T.U.C., who has always pursued a bitter anti-Communist and anti-Soviet policy. Citrine is still (1945) one of the two most powerful trade union leaders in Britain. The other is Ernest Bevin, now Foreign Secretary in the Labour Government.

Despite the opposition from the top, the struggle of the unemployed received wider and wider support. In 1936 was organised the last of the great Hunger Marches of the thirties and the unity built up in the Labour movement was a significant pointer to the feeling among very wide sections of the whole movement. In London for the first time, the official Reception Committee was formed by the London Trades Council (which itself is the representative of all unions in the London area). Nearly 2½ lakhs of Londoners greeted the unemployed Marchers. Impressive processions came from different parts of the capital to join up in the traditional meeting place of the Labour movement, the Hyde Park.

Local Labour Parties, Co-operative Guilds, Trade Unions, Communist Party Branches, marching together all testified to the unity which had been achieved. One of the most striking demonstrations was provided by hundreds of students from Oxford, Cambridge and London who marched side by side with their working-class comrades. Symbolic of the unity of that day was the presence on the same platform, of Clement Attlee, leader of the Labour Party and Wal Hannington, leader of the N.U.W.M. Had the leadership been prepared for whole-hearted co-operation, the unity achieved in 1936 in support of the unemployed could have revitalised the entire movement. But it was not to be. And over the issue of Spain, the militant rank and file found themselves once more thwarted and opposed by the top leadership.

The national and international fight against Fascism reached its climax in the tremendous struggle of Spanish democracy. Prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the European Labour movement had already registered striking advances in furthering working-class and democratic unity against Fascist reaction. The People's Front in France, an electoral combination of the Socialist, Communist and Radical parties, had won a great victory in the French general election of Spring 1936. In Spain, in February of the same year, the democratic parties of the Left had also won power.

This was in vivid contrast to the 1935 election in Britain where the refusal of working-class unity and a general defeatist and passive attitude on the part of the Labour leadership had resulted in another Conservative victory. The Labour Party, it is true, had increased their poll by 2½ millions and their number of M.P.s from 52 to 154, but they had completely thrown away the chances of victory by their lack of vigour and general passivity and by their refusal to lead the unemployed in particular, in a mighty movement against the Tory Government.

*The people could have been mobilised.* The Communists had shown what was possible ; had the tremendous weight and influence of the whole Labour movement been thrown into the struggle, nothing that the reactionary Tory politicians could have done would have prevailed against the united weight of the people. But the leadership was more afraid of the militant forces among its own rank and file than of the class enemy. The ideas and practice of the Labour aristocracy once again intervened to refuse to the Labour movement that vigorous leadership for which it was asking. And this policy of trailing in the wake of the imperialists was never more clearly demonstrated than in the fight over "non-intervention" in Spain.

The issue at stake was a very simple one. The Spanish Government had been democratically elected in February 1936. In June, the landlords and the big capitalists, supported by the Catholic Church, itself one of the largest landowners, fomented an uprising against the Government. Had it not been for the armed support of Italian and German Fascism, the revolt would have been easily crushed by the Spanish People's Government. But

from the beginning Italian, and later German, Fascism poured arms and men into Spain on the side of Franco and his Fascist hordes. All that the Spanish Government asked was to be allowed to buy arms from other countries, as the legally elected representative of the Spanish people. Could any demand have been more simple or just?

The Western powers, led by the landlord-capitalist Government of Britain, did not see the matter so clearly. For them it was no simple question of justice and moral right. They felt their own class position challenged by the growth of progressive forces in France and Spain and by the growing strength of similar forces in Britain. A victory for the Spanish People's Government would have enormously strengthened the democratic movements all over the world. The demand for the union of all countries against international Fascism might well prove irresistible. The British Government, therefore, with the help of reaction everywhere, set about to find ways and means to sabotage the heroic fight of the Spanish people. They evolved the notorious policy of "non-intervention" and "neutrality" which denied the Spanish Government its legal right to buy arms and munitions of war. Franco, in the meanwhile, continued to receive ever increasing quantities of war materials from Germany and Italy and Italian troops began to pour into the country.

To the shameful policy of the British Government was added the support of the Trade Union and Labour Party leadership. It took 18 months of the most intense political activity to change this into support for the Spanish people.

Once again the rank and file took the initiative and led by the Communist Party, there began the biggest single mobilisation of the people in the whole decade. The Communists began the formation of a British battalion for the famous International Brigade, helped by famous veterans of the Labour movement like H. N. Brailsford; and a thousand British dead testified to the determination of the British Labour movement to do everything in its power to assist Spanish democracy.

The Left Book Club began a tremendous campaign through its many thousands of members and provided a common platform for all Democrats, Communists, Socialists, Liberals who fought

for the elementary rights of the Spanish Government. On January 18th, 1937, the Socialist League (a left-wing organisation within the Labour Party), the Communist Party and Independent Labour Party launched a unity campaign "for action, for attack, for ending of retreat, for building of the strength, unity and power of the working-class movement." In their manifesto the three parties emphasised that they stood for "the unity of all sections of the working-class movement . . . in the struggle against Fascism, reaction and war and against the National (Conservative) Government." Launched amid keen enthusiasm at the famous Free Trade Hall in Manchester the unity campaign went on to hold some of the biggest political meetings of these years. Great gatherings at Cardiff and Swansea in Wales, Birmingham in the Midlands, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland and at the huge Albert Hall in London, all testified to the wide support among the rank and file.

The unity campaign had put forward social and economic demands which evoked an immediate response from the members of the movement. The essentials of these demands were : Increased scales of unemployment benefit, the forty-hour week in industry, higher wages and the abolition of the tied cottage for agricultural workers, nationalisation of the land, mines and the Bank of England and the general principle of making the rich pay for social amelioration. Thousands of individual members of the Labour Party went on record in support of the unity campaign ; many trade union branches did the same. The campaign of these three parties were closely linked with the Spanish struggle and against both the Trade Union leadership in particular fought very bitterly. The Socialist League, not without opposition, was expelled from the Labour Party (the voting on the Labour Party executive was 23 for and 9 against—a significant minority) ; but the campaign went on growing in strength.

The Trade Union Congress later in 1937 reversed their decision to support "non-intervention" ; Mr. Attlee visited Spain and gave his name to one of the British battalions. But it was too late and the heroic Spanish people fell under the bloody rule of Franco. From the beginning to the end of the Spanish war no large-scale campaign was organised by the Trade Union move-

ment. They were against unity because unity meant action ; the militants of their own rank and file were more dangerous in their eyes than the imperialists in the National Government. It is the policy and ideology of the Labour aristocracy worked out to its logical conclusion.

Given their refusal to recognise the class struggle in modern society, given their failure to recognise that the abolition of capitalism will never come about without the most violent opposition from the capitalists themselves, their policies can be understood. Fundamentally their understanding remained that of the workers in the period 1850-1880 who considered that all that they could do was to win the best conditions possible within the existing framework of capitalist society. They may talk socialism, but the divorce between their theory and practice was profound and in practical politics they acted as left-wing liberals.

A working class historian summed up the situation thus : "Is it" he asked, "that the leaders of the movement are insincere men, dishonest men, men who deliberately ignore the lessons of experience ? Nothing of the kind. They are men whose point of view has been shaped by the circumstances of their personal and political lines, and that point of view may be summed up by saying that they have a profound lack of faith in the working class and an equally profound, almost a superstitious, awe of what they feel to be the almighty and unshakable power of the capitalist class. Hence they take the accomodating (i.e. the compromising) course. Hence the General Strike surrender, hence 1931, hence the line up with the Tory Government over Spain." And, it might be added, hence the acquiescence in the shameful Munich betrayal of Czechoslovakia and virtual support to the Government in the crucial days of 1939 in its refusal to stand with the U.S.S.R. in opposition to German Fascism.

Upon the leaders of the British Labour movement there rested a tremendous responsibility. The objective conditions were ripe for tremendous advances ; the period between the two wars was one in which British Imperialism proved completely incapable of solving its own problems. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the weakness of the Labour leadership has very materially assisted the Tory imperialists to maintain their strength

and to consolidate their position. Macdonaldism proved disastrous and yet the history of 1931-39 shows only the most formal repudiation of MacDonald's policy. Hatred of working-class unity, underestimation of the power of the people, refusal to recognise that only through a policy of struggle can the movement move forward, support for the imperialists in their colonial policy—these attitudes and policies stem from MacDonald and the earlier leaders who came over to the Labour movement from Liberalism.

On the outbreak of World War II, the British Labour movement showed more clearly than ever the two tendencies within its ranks. Class struggle or class compromise?—the question was still unanswered. The growing progressive forces threw their shadows before and the war years were to see considerable changes in their consolidation and further development.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR YEARS AND LABOUR VICTORY : 1939-1945

THE YEARS OF WAR AGAINST FASCISM HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT CHANGES of far-reaching consequence in the social and political life of Britain. It is perhaps difficult for Indian opinion to appreciate at a distance of 6,000 miles, the bitterness of these years ; the tremendous sacrifices which the whole people of Europe willingly made in order that the foul monster of Fascism be crushed for ever. Brutality acquired a new and deeper meaning when Fascism came to power.

Especially in the war years the terror and oppression of the Fascist dictatorships have been of a bloody and bestial nature, the like of which the world had never seen in its long history of suffering and misery. Hitler and his gang reduced Europe to a slave colony, the death camps of Maidanek and Belsen bear grim testimony to the determination of these tyrants to destroy all who stood in their path. The destruction of all working-class, progressive and liberal organisations, the persecution of the Christian Church, the physical annihilation of the Jews and the Slav races whom the Germans considered sub-human, the extermination of education and culture—this was Fascism in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children suffered torture and death because of their refusal to bow down to their Fascist masters. Their lives they considered of no account if by their death another link was added to the chain of resistance.

Mere words cannot describe the struggles, the heroism, the sacrifices which the peoples of Europe made in order that future generations might live free from the nightmare of Fascist terror. Their example will be a shining light for all time.

The people of Britain were spared the horrors of Fascist occupation. Partly through their own efforts, partly through the efforts and sacrifices of Europe and, in particular, through the

might and strength of the Soviet Union, the Fascist invader set no foot upon British soil. In these years, the fight of Britain was indissolubly linked with that of the whole of Europe. Each was complementary to the other ; and in the growing bitterness of the struggle, the British people felt themselves at one with the oppressed nations on the Continent.

It was an important element in the developing struggle against Fascism that the consciousness of what Fascism really is, should also develop and grow among the British people. The history of British "appeasement" to the Fascist powers in the thirties began to be re-examined in a new light. Most important of all, the tremendous battle of the whole Soviet people aroused the greatest enthusiasm. For many years the world had been deluged with lies and slanders concerning the Soviet State ; the British imperialists had been in the front rank of those who wished to keep the truth from the common man.

The struggle of the Soviet peoples against German and Italian Fascism dispelled for ever these lies and falsehoods. Only a state which had the fullest support from its peoples could have rallied and fought back against the treacherous attack of June 1941. The defence of Stalingrad was a victory for all the freedom-loving peoples. During the critical war years, the desire to understand the nature of the one state which was not only checking, but beating back the Fascist invader, grew more and more amid an ever-increasing number of the people. Hundreds of thousands of pounds were willingly subscribed to every fund launched to aid the Soviet people in their great battle for freedom.

Thus, there developed a consciousness of what were the basic issues at stake in the most bloody of all wars. The real nature of Fascism as the terrorist organisation of monopoly-capitalism, the appreciation of the Soviet Union as a truly democratic state whose interests were those of the whole people and not of a single exploiting class ; the role of the Communists and socialists as the core around which the resistance movements developed—the understanding of all these things resulted in a deepening of political consciousness among the British people.

This increased political understanding which developed as the war moved on to its climax led to a mobilisation of the

people unparalleled in British history. The winning of the war against the Fascist dictatorships could only be achieved through the whole-hearted participation of every one in the common effort. Given that the working class recognized that only if Fascism were defeated could there be any advance towards progress and socialism in individual countries, it was inevitable that the demand for all-out prosecution of the war should come from the ranks of the Labour movement. It was understood that during the war there was no question of any radical transformation of the class basis of British society. The Labour movement fully appreciated that the war was in their interests ; that the defeat of Fascist reaction and the increased strength of the Soviet Union would mean the establishment of fully democratic national states in Europe in the post-war years. They also realised that the more the Labour movement fought for those measures which would lead to a more efficient prosecution of the war the speedier would come victory, the greater and stronger would the Labour movement itself become.

That was the spirit of the British working-class movement in the years following the entry of the Soviet Union into the war. A victory of Fascism would mean that the results of the struggles of a hundred years would be lost. The defeat of Fascism would mean (and has meant) the opening of the floodgates of the democratic forces everywhere in the world, in a situation where the progressive sections of every people are in a more favourable position than ever before. And above all they understood that only the more resolute determination to unite their whole people to fight till final victory would defeat also all the intrigues of high circles in Britain's ruling-class to save German and Japanese Fascism from complete destruction.

And so the British Labour movement concentrated upon winning the war ; in so doing they immensely strengthened themselves and their organisations and laid the solid foundations for their future advance.

What were the achievements of the Labour movement during the war years ? First and most important, the Labour movement was able to insist that none of the major problems of labour and production should be solved without their direct participation. It

is not suggested for one moment that the employing class welcomed such participation. Quite the contrary. But they were forced to accept what was to them an unpleasant reminder of the strength and influence of the working-class movement.

This strength and influence grew in the war years, because it became plain that the increasingly difficult war-time problems could only be solved with the fullest co-operation of the peoples' organisations. It is only necessary to point out the contrast with India where the bureaucracy has consistently and obstinately refused the advice and co-operation of the Indian people. The result has been gross inefficiency, mass corruption and a complete inability to tackle even the most elementary problems of food and clothing.

Three main aspects of the work of the Labour movement may be distinguished.

There was, first, the greatly increased strength of the trade unions and the establishment of a minimum wage and guaranteed conditions in many industries which hitherto had been unorganised and unregulated.

The second, and perhaps the most important war-time development, was the initiative of the workers themselves in increasing production. The rise of the Joint Production Committees, in which workers sat side by side with the employers, solving their industrial problems and working out more efficient methods, is perhaps the best example of the understanding that the war was in the interests of the people.

The third aspect was the great part which the industrial working class played in putting forward political demands which they felt would further the war effort, not only of Britain but of the Allied Nations in general. The most striking of these demands was the call for a Second Front in Europe, i.e. for a Western Front to relieve the strain upon Russia fighting in the East.

The end of 1944 saw membership of all unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress number no less than 7 millions. This was an increase of some 2½ millions over the 1939 figures, in spite of the call-up into the Army of hundreds of thousands of trade unionists. Women who have entered industry to make up for the

men in the Armed Forces, have been enrolled in great numbers. Union organisation has been especially successful in areas and industries which up to the war were backward and unorganised.

The catering industry, for example, covering all workers in hotels and restaurants, was always notorious for long hours of work and inadequate pay. Minimum standards, both for hours of work and for wages, have now been established. The mine-workers for the first time in their history have achieved a guaranteed weekly wage. Agricultural labourers, always among the most exploited sections of the population, have now a minimum wage scale, even though it is still far below the average wage level for the whole country.

In the field of union organisation, great strides have been made. The huge engineering works owned by Fords, the motor car manufacturers, had ever since its establishment refused to allow its workers to organise themselves into unions. The Trade Union Congress forced the Government to intervene and the rights of trade unions inside the Ford Works are now guaranteed. The great rubber firm, Dunlops, always a 'black' spot for trade unionism, is today 100 per cent organised. Countless other examples could be given from all over Britain.

The trade unions fought for the elementary rights of the workers because without the establishment of these rights, the whole-hearted co-operation of the working class, who form the overwhelming majority of the population, could not be achieved. The unions, however, went much further. In order to effect the most efficient prosecution of the war, the rank and file, led by the Communists, began to demand a voice in the organisation of production. And so the Joint Production Committees were brought into existence and they have proved one of the most effective war-winning weapons on the whole industrial front.

The initiative for the formation of Joint Production Committees came from the workers through their Shop Stewards organisations. The Shop Steward movement had originated in World War I when the trade union bureaucracy had surrendered completely to the Government. The rank and file in the factories began therefore to organise independently of the unions. Each section or "shop" in any factory would appoint its own repre-

sentative who was called the Shop Steward, and Shop Stewards would form a committee covering the whole factory.

In the war which began in 1939, the development of the Shop Stewards movement has been very important. Most marked has been its growth in the engineering and aircraft industries. In mining, the foundation of 'Pit' committees has been a parallel development. It should be added that there has been a much closer connection in this war between the Shop Stewards and the official trade union movements. The Shop Stewards represent, of course, the trade union members in the factories and the closer link between the rank and file and the trade union officials has resulted in a much closer response to the demands and grievances of the rank and file.

The impetus to increased production which came from the Joint Production Committees has been recognised as one of the major successes of the war. For the first time workers, through their own representatives, were able to put forward suggestions for increasing productive efficiency and for removing causes of friction in the working of their factories. It cannot be said that the employers as a whole looked with favour on this free discussion, but the industrial workers proved strong enough to override their objections. Local Production Committees led to the formation of further committees, first on an area scale and then nationally, in all of which the unions were fully represented.

The Joint Production Committees in conjunction with the Shop Stewards would organise meetings to explain the nature of the anti-Fascist war, and the necessity for increased efficiency and production and at such discussions the complaints, grievances and difficulties of the workers would be thoroughly and carefully examined. It was democracy in action, a real working democracy in which every worker felt that he had a share in the co-operative effort. It was after all, his sons and daughters who were in the front line against the Fascist enemy and the development of this workshop and factory democracy effected more than anything else the whole-hearted and conscious mobilisation of the mass of the people in the total war.

The industrial workers were not content simply to work within their factories for increased production. What their

increased production was going to achieve was to them just as important. The extension of democracy in the factories had resulted in higher production ; so in the political life of the country and in connection with the war effort as a whole the industrial working class began to press its own ideas and demands.

The problem was partly one of the extension of democratic rights inside Britain, partly of the direction of the strategy of the war effort in general. Thus the millions of trade unionists, who, by their insistence, forced the Government to remove the ban on the Communist paper, the *Daily Worker*, did so because they realised the vital role of the Communists in rallying the whole people. When the Government released the British Fascist, Mosley, the factory workers led the nationwide agitation for his immediate re-imprisonment.

It was, however, in the demand for the Second Front that the industrial workers, led by the Communist Party, were most insistent and determined. The heroic struggles of the Russian peoples and the growing resistance movements in Europe had deeply stirred the entire nation. The demand for increased production in the factories was coupled with the agitation for the opening of the attack on Western Europe.

The issue of the Second Front dominated internal politics in Britain from 1942 until its realisation in June 1944. All over the country demonstrations were held in factories and workshops and delegations representing thousands of workers were sent to interview members of Parliament. The opposition came from the expected quarters—from the Munichites, those who, outside and inside Parliament had supported Chamberlain's pro-Fascist policies. The capitalist Press trumpeted their opposition and the working class was only partially able, through its own limited journals and through certain progressive groups in Parliament, to present its case with the weight and influence it deserved. When the Second Front was finally launched, the working class pledged themselves to fulfil all the demands which might be made of them.

The Labour Party in these years hardly existed as an independent political force. The Labour and Trade Union leadership since 1940 had been in the Coalition Government headed by

Winston Churchill. In their individual capacity as Ministers many of them did excellent and very useful work. Ernest Bevin as Minister for Labour was outstanding. What was, however, incorrect was their understanding of the political requirements of the war against Fascism. In the Churchill Government there remained many notorious reactionaries, of whom Leopold Amery is the example known to every Indian.

But the Labour Party interpreted the *electoral* truce, which was agreed on as a war-time necessity by all the major political parties, as a *political* truce, in which no discussion of urgent political questions was allowed. Instead of appreciating the widespread dissatisfaction existing in the country regarding the still powerful influence of the monopoly-capitalists, represented by the Tories in Parliament, the leaders of the Labour Party were content to follow the political line worked out by Churchill and the Tory Party. Outstanding was the fact that no attempt was made by the Labour Party leaders to reverse Amery's brutal policy in India ; in Greece, Churchill's imperialist intervention was shamefully supported by the Labour leadership. It was left to the Communists to expose the lies and slanders of Amery and Tottenham against Congress in the years following 1942. The result was that the political demands of the industrial workers received little, if any, support from the Labour Party and the whole movement was prevented from moving forward to achieve that democratisation of British life which the situation demanded.

It remained for the Communist Party to serve as the authentic voice of the people. The C.P. observed and supported the *electoral* truce but this did not mean that they also refused to give a lead on vital political questions. The Communists were the first to demand workers' participation in factory production and management and it was Communist trade unionists who formed the first Joint Production Committees. They were the first to raise the call for the opening of the Second Front. They took the initiative in demanding adequate air-raid precautions ; on them fell the task of organising the Labour movement's vigorous opposition to the release of Mosley.

The Communists from the first demanded that India be given her freedom, in order that her 400 million people might be enabled



to throw their whole weight and influence against German and Japanese Fascism. The campaign which the Communist Party carried on among the British people for Indian independence received a great impetus from the Labour Party Conference of December 1944, when a resolution affirming the necessity for unfettered freedom for India was passed amidst great enthusiasm.

The membership of the Communist Party was under 20,000 in 1939 ; at the end of the war it stood at 60,000 and with the demobilisation of the Armed Forces at least one lakh membership will be recorded. It is not just a question of numbers, however. The point to note is that the British Communist Party today is composed of the leading militants in the factories, in the shops and in the countryside. It is only in these last few years that the Communist Party has become deeply rooted among the industrial working class. For the first time in British Labour history the divorce between political theory and industrial radicalism has been overcome. The Communist Party unites the industrial and political struggles into one mass movement ; it guides the whole Labour movement on all issues affecting the livelihood of the British people. It stands four-square for the ending of colonial oppression.

Great strides have been made in recent years towards overcoming the disunity within the Labour movement. The notorious 'Black Circular' which operated against Communists being elected to official trade union positions has now been removed.

All over the country Communists have been elected to important Trade Union positions, including membership of the highest Trade Union body, the General Council of the T.U.C. The Secretaryship of the London Trades Council, the largest in the country (over 5 lakhs) is now held by J. Jacobs, a Communist.

The list of outstanding Communist Trade Union leaders is

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\*The 'Black Circular' was endorsed by the Trades Union Conference in 1935. 1,869,000 votes were cast for the recommendation of the General Council and 1,174,000 against. Even in 1935, therefore, there was a substantial minority of trade unionists within the TUC which recognised the great contribution which the Communist Party had made and could make to the Labour movement. The 'Black Circular' was abolished in 1944 by an overwhelming majority at the Trade Union Congress.

impressive, reflecting as it does the confidence of the *working class* in the militant policy of the Party. Arthur Horner, *former President* of the South Wales Miners Federation, is today one of the Vice-Presidents of the newly formed National Union of Mineworkers, with a 7-lakh membership. Other Communist members on the Executive are William Pearson and Abe Moffatt. Two Communists, Wal Hannington (former leader of the unemployed) and George Crane are National Organisers for the Engineers Union, now nearly 10 lakhs strong. Joe Scott is another very well-known Communist leader on the Engineers' Executive. Among the Transport Workers (the largest union in the country) Bert Papworth is an outstanding figure. He led the famous London Bus Strike at the time of the present King's Coronation and he is today an Executive member of the General Council of the TUC. Tim Burns has for many years been an Executive member of the important Locomotive Engineers, one of the three Railwaymen's Unions. Alderman Sharman, for long a leading militant in the same union and today its President has recently joined the Communist Party. Betty Wallace, former war-time organiser of the women's section of the Fire Brigade Union has recently been appointed to the Women's Advisory Council of the TUC.

These are only some of the most outstanding positions which Communists occupy at the present time. Among the miners and engineers in particular the Communist Party has a decisive mass influence. In addition, almost all full-time organisers of the Party were former trade union militants. Harry Pollitt himself was a boiler-maker and one of the trustees of his union. Willie Gallacher, Communist M.P. and Ted Bramley, secretary of the London District Committee of the Party were engineers. Peter Kerrigan, National Organiser, played a leading part in all the industrial struggles on Clydeside and organised the Scottish Hunger Marchers.

Indicative of the prestige and influence of Communist trade unionists is the recent appointment of Arthur Horner to lead the coal production drive for the Labour Government; Bert Papworth, Executive member of the Trade Union Congress was one of the two delegates sent to Greece to ensure that the trade

union elections in that country were free and democratic. He was also one of the representatives of the British TUC at the World Trade Union Conference held in October in Paris. Joe Scott now sits on a Labour Party sub-committee which is considering how the number of trade unionists affiliated to the Labour Party can be increased.\*

The composition of the Editorial Board of the *Daily Worker* is a good indication of the growing influence of the Communist Party. The Dean of Canterbury, Beatrix Lehmann (the famous actress), Irish play-wright Sean O'Casey, sit side by side with Communist editors William Rust and Ivor Montagu. J. B. S. Haldane, known the world over as an outstanding British scientist and G. C. T. Giles, former President of the National Union of Teachers have recently been elected to the Communist Party's Executive Committee.

At a *Daily Worker* Conference on Post-War Plans held in London on May 12, 1945, 20 lakhs of workers were represented. The National Union of Mine-workers (7 lakhs), Civil Service Clerical Association (140,000) Fire Brigades Union (147,000) were some of the national organisations represented, besides dozens of Trade Union Branches, District Committees, Trade Councils, Shop Stewards Committees and Factory Groups. The *Daily Worker* is planning for a post-war circulation of 5 lakhs and once the paper control is lifted, it is confident that the figure will be easily achieved.

The Communist Party does not see its own growth and influence as something opposed to the rest of the Labour movement. The Party is, as we have seen, firmly based among the industrial workers; it desires to work in the closest harmony and unity with the Labour Party. The function of the Communist Party, as an organisation uniting revolutionary theory and practice, is to give leadership to the whole labour movement. What the Communist Party seeks to accomplish is to win

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\*The bulk of the membership of the Labour Party consists of the affiliated trade unions. These unions affiliate to the Labour Party, not on the basis of their total membership, but according to the proportion of their members who have paid what is known as the political levy, i.e. a small sum per year paid by the individual trade unionist.

the entire movement for a vigorous, positive policy based on the interests of the people and repudiating completely the policy and theory of class collaboration pursued by the Labour leadership in the years before the war.

The political unity of the Labour movement hinges on the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party. Repeated attempts in the thirties were made by the C. P. and definite assurances were given that the C.P. would loyally abide by the democratic decisions of Labour Party Conferences and that it would work within the accepted constitutional framework of the Labour Party. Affiliation was always refused and the votes of the two powerful general unions, the Transport Workers and the Municipal and General Workers, were always used to defeat the affiliation move. (These two unions, led by Ernest Bevin and Charles Dukes respectively have always been consistently anti-unity and against a militant policy of struggle.)

There is good reason to hope that when the application for affiliation is raised again (as it will be in the 1946 Labour Party Conference) the great development of trade union unity in the war years will be powerful enough to achieve this very necessary political unity.

All this does not mean that the task of the Communist Party in the next few years will be an easy one. It must be emphasised that the leadership of the Labour movement is still in the hands of those who, before the war, proved incapable or unwilling to pursue an all-out programme and policy of opposition to the capitalist class.\*

Times, however, have changed and some of the leaders have changed too. What must be realised is that today the very existence of a strong Communist Party means that it is going to be increasingly difficult for any reactionary leaders of Labour

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\*It must further be emphasised that especially in foreign affairs, and particularly in relation to India and the colonies, imperialist ideology is still very widespread, not only among the leadership but also among many of the rank and file of the whole Labour movement. Of major political parties, the Communist Party alone has consistently campaigned for the freedom of all colonial countries and for a complete break with imperialist tradition.

to carry out their line of class collaboration. They may succeed in overcoming the growing progressive forces, led by the Communist Party, in the short run or in individual cases, but there is good hope that the betrayals which took place after the last war will not and cannot again be repeated. No one can chart the future in detail ; the Labour and T.U. leadership still retain the confidence of the majority of the Labour movement ; all that can be said is that the fundamentally new factor in the post-war situation is the strong Communist Party, drawing around it all the democratic and progressive elements from both the working and the middle classes.

### *The Victory Of The Labour Party*

It is not difficult to understand, in the light of what has been written in the preceding pages, why the Labour Party achieved such a striking success in the British General Election of July 1945. A summary of the reasons for this victory might usefully be given here.

1. The most important general factor was the growth in political consciousness among the whole people since 1935, when the last election was held. At that time Fascism had only been in power for some 2½ years in Germany and the full implications of what Fascism really stood for were only partially understood. Since then and particularly during the war years, the recognition of Fascism as the naked dictatorship of monopoly-capitalism has been widely appreciated. As a result, there has developed a much clearer realisation of the basis for Chamberlain's appeasement policy towards the Fascist countries.

The friends of Fascism in England were seen to be the property-owners, the landlords and the capitalists who were more anxious to win the friendship of Germany and Italy than to safeguard the interests of the British people. Only the whole-hearted co-operation of the Western Democracies with the Soviet Union could have prevented the war and this was precisely what Chamberlain and the Munichites consistently refused.

It is not only in foreign affairs that the political undertsanding of the British people has grown. During the war miracles of organisation and production have been achieved with the full

co-operation of the people. They have seen that the problem of unemployment, so widespread before the war, is not difficult to solve provided the Government is one which considers the interests of the whole people. Unemployment and the Distressed Areas existed in between the two wars because the Government was not a people's Government, but one which represented the interests of those who owned the land and the capital.

The war has ensured work for all and better food distribution and the people are determined that these things shall be similarly organised in the days of peace. The successive Conservative Governments from 1918 onwards proved completely incapable of preventing millions of unemployed, widespread malnutrition and inadequate housing. 'Never again' cried the people and gave the Tory Party the biggest defeat in its history.

2. The growth in working-class organisation and the rise of a powerful Communist Party were essential factors in the Labour Party victory. Throughout the thirties and the war years there had poured out from the working class and progressive Press a torrent of books, pamphlets and articles analysing the past mistakes and pointing the way forward.

Unity, and still more unity, was the theme hammered home by countless numbers of speakers and in thousands of articles, and the success of this propaganda was seen in the growing support for unity among all sections of the Labour movement and in the developing influence of the Communist Party. The workers had proved what could be achieved through unity in the war years and they put their whole weight and influence behind the Labour Party in the election, in order that what had been accomplished in these years should serve as the foundation for advance in the future.

Over 50 Labour MPs have gone on record stating that the assistance of the Communist Party was a vital factor in their election campaign. All over the country, the Communists worked whole-heartedly and without reservation for a Labour Party victory. Their influence among the factory workers and their capacity for hard work greatly contributed to the tremendous defeat of Toryism.

3. One of the notable features of the election was the wide-

spread support which the middle classes gave to the Labour Party. The development of radical and democratic opinion among the middle strata of the population has already been described in Chapter III. 1945 was the first time in British history that the middle classes voted in large numbers against the Tory Party. The teachers, civil servants, professional people, small shopkeepers and technicians had realised that capitalism could no longer offer them freedom and security and they joined with the working masses to demand a just and progressive society.

Other sections, too, which hitherto had always been under the domination of the Tories, at this election voted Labour. For centuries the agricultural workers in the villages had been under the influence of the squires and landlords. Today that influence has been broken. The foundations for a virile trade union movement in the countryside have been firmly laid and the oppressive power of their masters is being challenged.

4. No account of the General Election of July 1945 should omit the mistakes made by Winston Churchill and the Tory Party. No one denies that Churchill during the war years was a great leader. He *was* a great war leader precisely because he reflected the desires and wishes of the mass of the people. The people wanted total war against Fascism and Churchill voiced their sentiments and worked for that end.

As soon as the German war ended, Churchill became once more the Conservative Party leader and the mass of the people were not slow to realise the difference. Churchill had always been notorious as the bitter enemy of organised Labour and his record in the General Strike and in other disputes was not forgotten. Churchill as the war leader of a united Britain was one thing ; Churchill as the leader of the hated Conservative Party was a very different proposition.

It was not only that the Conservative Party seriously miscalculated when they sought to use the glamour of Churchill's name to win the election, they also underestimated the political intelligence of the nation as a whole. The Conservatives had won the 1931 and 1935 elections by the liberal use of 'scares', designed to frighten the middle classes, in particular, from voting Labour.

Unfortunately for the Tories, the people had learnt to see through their phoney and mischievous stories and although the Tories in 1945 trotted out the usual lying propaganda about the dangers of a Labour victory, it had not the slightest effect upon the electorate. Like imperialists the world over, the Tories are supercilious and condescending in their attitude towards the common people. They are unable to realise and appreciate what bitter experiences the people have passed through in the past few years and how they are determined that such things shall not occur again.

What of the future? A word of caution may be necessary here. The object of this pamphlet has been to show the rise of the progressive forces inside Britain, the most bourgeois and the strongest imperialist of all countries. It must never be forgotten that the long and often painful history of the British working-class movement has been largely a process (still uncompleted) of disillusionment with the theories and practice of the Labour aristocracy, which has so long acted as a drag upon those who wanted to go forward to build a socialist state.

During that long history, many democratic rights have been wrested from an unwilling ruling class; but the decisive struggle against the entrenched powers of privilege and property is a matter for the future. The forces of reaction are still immensely strong; the class structure of British society has been untouched up to the present time. The British working class never for one moment underestimate the strength of their own imperialists; nor should their friends in other countries.

That word of caution having been said, it must now be emphasised that the Labour Party, controlling as it does a great majority in the British Parliament, was never in a more favourable position. Internationally, Fascism has been defeated, and Fascism's friends in all countries have received a great set-back. In Britain, the Labour Party has a tremendous opportunity. It was elected on a programme which, although not socialist, will lay the foundations in the next five years for the transition to a socialist state. The working class has grown stronger in every way; given a forthright and vigorous lead nothing will withstand its united might.



The battle is only now beginning. The forces of reaction will leave no avenue of opposition unexplored. They will first try to wean the Labour Party leadership away from a progressive policy by flattery and honeyed words ; if that fails then an increasing degree of opposition, upto financial and industrial sabotage, can be expected. No exploiting class in the world has ever given up its privileged position without a vigorous and usually vicious struggle.

The history of the rule of the British imperialists is not such as will breed illusions in those who seek to change the balance of inequality in our society. Every measure of social progress has always been opposed in the past. How much greater will the opposition be when the fundamental change in class relationships is in question. The Labour Party is committed to implement a limited programme of industrial nationalisation and a general and much needed democratisation of British society. Not to expect fierce political struggles would be to ignore the character and the past history of the British capitalist class.

The Labour Party, too, has its own problems. The two tendencies within the Labour movement have not been dissolved during the war years. The question of class collaboration or class struggle presents itself in a form more acute than ever today. It presents itself not only in relation to internal British politics but, perhaps even more important, in imperial affairs. The militancy of the rank and file has always been marked in home affairs ; it has been much more confused and unclear over the problems of the colonial countries. Those who have consistently fought for a vigorous working-class policy at home and an equally vigorous anti-imperialism abroad, have always been in a minority. The Communist Party has been the only organised group which has consistently and unswervingly campaigned for colonial freedom as an essential part of the Labour movement's own struggle for democracy and socialism.

The line-up of the Labour leadership with the Tories has always been more marked in foreign and colonial affairs than in home affairs. The degree of acquiescence of large numbers of

the Labour movement in this collaboration has been widespread and must not be underestimated.

The hope for the future lies in the growing progressive forces within the trade unions and the Labour movement in general. Led by the Communist Party, these forces proclaim their faith in the power of the working class and its allies to overcome all difficulties and all opposition. That these forces are strong today there is no doubt. That the future lies with them there is no question. The problem for Britain ( and for the world democratic forces ) is whether the progressive forces will be sufficiently powerful to win the whole Labour movement for a forward policy and in particular, to evoke that response from the Labour Government which will correspond to the militancy of the rank and file.

History will answer our question. For the achievement of a democratic and socialist Britain, of a Britain which has finished once and for all with imperialist exploitation, the Communist Party and the developing progressive movement will work unceasingly, recognising, as Frederick Engels said long ago, that "there is no power in the world which could for a day resist the British working class organised as a body."

## BRITISH BREAD AND INDIAN FREEDOM

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE AIMS OF THIS SHORT BOOKLET ?

1. To show that Britain, the mother country of imperialism, is a land in which wealth, power and influence is the prerogative of a minority. The majority of the people, the workers and their families, are denied the opportunities and benefits which modern science and modern productive methods could easily give them.

2. To indicate, all too briefly, the struggle of the common man and woman against their grasping exploiters and to show the emergence, slowly and painfully, of the Labour movement based on the trade unions of the industrial workers.

3. To emphasise that within the Labour movement there has developed a hard core of Communist and socialist opinion (the "progressive forces"), no longer content simply to work for reforms within the existing capitalist framework, but which recognises that capitalism can no longer offer its people any possibility for further advance. Democracy and progress are no longer compatible with capitalism; capitalism and the whole brutal imperialist system must therefore go.

It may be asked at this stage where India comes into the picture.

India, of course, is very vitally concerned with what happens in Britain. It is not only that British Imperialism is the hated third party, that is the dominating fact in British-Indian relationships. But in a much wider sense, what happens in Britain or in India is a concern of every other country in the world. There can be no solution of any one country's problems in isolation. The world is one, as Wendell Willkie was never tired of emphasising. World prosperity and world happiness, like world peace, are indivisible.

The rise of large scale industries, the development of modern

communications, the railway, the steamship and the aeroplane have made the world interdependent. Capitalism in its later stages has laid the foundation for a unified world, one in which nations will co-operate for the well-being of all. Such a world state will not arise, of course, until capitalism and the system of colonial exploitation are abolished. But the framework is there; it remains for the peoples of the world to strive for its realisation.

For many centuries, mankind has had the vision of peaceful world, its different nationalities united in friendly co-operation one with the other. Only when capitalism spread all over the world, was the economic basis for such a world state laid. It was inevitable that just as the working class was the only class which in each capitalist country was capable of leading the peoples forward to socialism, so internationally from the early beginnings of the Labour movement, the people have always looked for, and lent support to their working class brothers in other lands. The struggle is a parallel one in all countries, although the form which the struggle takes between the working class and their exploiters differs according to the historical tradition of each particular nation.

Recognition of the common bond between the exploited in all countries received classic expression in the famous *Communist Manifesto* written in 1849. But long before Marx and Engels published the epoch-making manifesto, reactionaries on the one hand, and democrats on the other, had always taken sides with the corresponding classes in other countries.

Thus the French Revolution was viciously attacked by the British ruling class, and warmly supported by radicals and democrats. Right through the history of the last 150 years there runs this coincidence of interests between the same classes in different countries. The capitalist class has never judged any international problem from a moral standpoint. Does it further the class interests of capitalism in my own country and in the world in general?—is the question always asked. Since democracy anywhere in the world will ultimately come into conflict with world capitalism, in the most recent years in particular, the major capitalist powers have banded together to preserve their own powers and the rights of private property. The Capi-

talist International is no figment of the imagination. The Spanish people can tell us the bitter story of how every capitalist class in the world was arrayed against them.

Since profits know no national boundaries, neither does working-class solidarity. The foundation of the International Workingmen's Association in 1864 under the direct leadership of Karl Marx was the first step in the bringing together of national Labour movements into an international struggle against capitalism.

Just as there grew up two tendencies with the Labour movement ( not only in Britain but in all countries ) so in relation to internationalism there developed opposing viewpoints. Those who supported, consciously or unconsciously, the practice of class collaboration were narrow, unimaginative and pro-imperialist in their international outlook; the socialists and Communists, those who saw that capitalism wherever it was found was the enemy of progress, welcomed and encouraged co-operation and unity between the various national Labour movements.

Thus it was Harry Pollitt who led British dockers in their historic strike against the war of intervention against the young Soviet State ; Andre Marty, leading French Communist, who organised the mutiny on the French Fleet in the Black Sea for the same reason. When the British miners were left alone in 1926, contributions for their strike fund came from all over the world, including one million sterling from the Russian trade unions. It was the Communists and progressives in all countries who organised and built up the famous International Brigade which did such heroic work in Spanish Civil War, while the official Labour leaderships, for the most part, gave only token or half-hearted support.

In 1937 and 1938. British dockers, again led by the Communists, refused to load or unload Japanese goods, as a measure of their solidarity with the Chinese people. In December 1944, the rank and file of the Labour Party, led by the railway, mine-worker and engineer delegates, forced the leadership to accept a resolution pledging the support of the Labour movement for full independence to the Indian people. At the time of writing (October 1945) Australian Communists are leading the whole

Australian Labour movement in a boycott of Dutch ships and materials which are designed to crush the Indonesian nationalists.

The British working-class militants have a long association with the cause of Indian freedom. In the middle twenties the Communist leader, George Allison came to India and was almost immediately arrested and sentenced to 18 months' rigorous imprisonment in an Indian jail for his work in the Indian Trade Union movement. Who in India will forget Ben Bradley, Spratt and Lester Hutchinson (the latter now a Labour M.P.) in the historic Meerut Trial? The British Trade Union Congress sent Rs. 13,000 to help the famous Bombay Textile Strike in 1928, just prior to the Meerut arrests. The International Transport Workers Federation, Amsterdam, sent Rs. 700, the Russian Trade Unions Rs. 18,000. Another Rs. 12,000 was sent from England by the Meerut Defence Committee to assist the prisoners, both Indian and British.

Right from the thirties the Communist Party and the other left-wing forces in the Labour movement have consistently supported the Indian national movement. When Clement Attlee wrote in 1937 that British Labour must be wary of delivering India to the Indian capitalists, the Communist Party vigorously attacked this vicious nonsense, stating clearly and unequivocally that the Indian people must be given the unfettered right to solve their own problems. It was the *Daily Worker* which gave most prominence to the great anti-Fascist resolutions passed by the Indian National Congress at the time of the Spanish Civil War and the Munich betrayal. After August 1942, it was again the Communists who led the Labour movement in exposing the lies and slanders of Amery and the Delhi bureaucrats, when these latter accused the Congress of being pro-Fascist. Today the Communist Party is carrying on the fight for Indian independence and at the end of this pamphlet is printed the latest statement published by the British Communists. It was the Communist delegates among the railway workers, miners and engineers, today the most progressive of all the British Trade Unions, who took the lead in getting the Indian Independence Resolution successfully passed at the December 1944 Conference of the Labour Party.

For the progressive forces in the Labour movement, a victory

in one part of the world is a victory for the whole movement. World capitalism is dominated by vast international trusts and monopolies. In between the two wars some 20 to 30 of the largest trusts had a decisive influence in world economic life. The agreements between the German I.G. Farben and the American Standard Oil very materially restricted the production of certain vital war products in the United States (synthetic rubber is the best known example). Krupp and Co., was linked with the General Electric Co., which has large holdings in both the U.S. and Britain. Vickers in England, the Electric Boat Co. in the U.S., had a world-wide control of basic submarine designs and patents for over 25 years. In the thirties the International Rubber Regulation Committee was the child of British-Dutch rubber firms and production was restricted in order to keep up prices. In 1926 French and German interests united in the European Steel Cartel; Unilever, founded in 1929, and controlling companies with a capital of £200 million, had world interests in Britain, Nigeria, India and the Far East.

A successful struggle against any part of the world capitalist structure means a weakening of the system everywhere. That is the historic significance of the Soviet Union and that is why the entire world progressive forces regard the defence of the Soviet Union as their major concern. The existence of socialism in one-sixth of the world has very much increased the difficulties of the rest of the capitalist world, apart from the tremendous political and psychological power and influence which the Soviet Union exercises. A victory for Spanish democracy in 1936 would have revolutionised the entire world situation. Fascism would have received a decisive set-back and so Fascism's friends all over the world rushed in support of Franco and his German and Italian backers.

Is not the importance of the struggle for Indian independence *as a world issue*, clear and unmistakable? India is the cornerstone of British Imperialism. Spokesmen of imperialism have always recognised the supreme importance of India as the country around which the colonial empire is built. Here is what Lord Curzon wrote in 1898. "India is the pivot of our Empire. . . .

If the empire loses any other part of its dominion we can survive, but if we lose India, the sun of our Empire will set."

In recent years, the formation of companies, subsidiary to some of the big trusts in Britain, must be seen as an attempt to perpetuate the finance-capitalist hold over India in spite of tariffs and the possible future exclusion of British and other manufactured goods. Imperial Chemical Industries (India) Ltd. is a well-known case in point, and the list of such industries covers matches, cigarettes, soap, rubber tyres, paints and chemicals. Burma Shell is a further example of the exploitation of a vital raw material, oil, in the interests of British capitalists.

Economically, and strategically, India is the kingpin of the British Empire, the bulwark of reaction, the classic example of imperialist exploitation and oppression.

The struggle of the Indian peoples for independence therefore assumes an historic significance in the whole world movement for liberation and freedom. The achievement of Indian independence would be the biggest single factor in the final overthrow of world imperialism. It is no exaggeration to say that unless independence in India is realised, the realisation of socialism in Britain will remain beyond the grasp of the British Labour movement. Socialism in Britain and imperialist exploitation in India is a contradiction in terms and impossible in practice.

Let us examine this argument further, for it is the key to the understanding of Indo-British relationships. Why is it that British freedom and Indian independence can be never achieved separately, that the fight in each of these two countries for the realisation of their aims is but the other side to the same picture? Why, in other words, can one say that Indian independence can only be won if the Labour movement in England wins decisive power, and similarly, that this decisive power can only be obtained with the help and assistance of the Indian liberation movement?

The answer is in the recognition that the power and strength of the British imperialists lies mainly in two countries, Britain and India. Remove one of them and the other becomes weak and enfeebled. The ruling class in Britain has received the tribute drawn from India for the past 200 years and its position in rela-



tion to its own working class has been correspondingly strengthened.

The British imperialists have received a training in brutality and coercive methods in the colonial countries (and especially in India) which they have not been, and will not be, slow to utilise against their own people when occasion demands. In the 19th century, because of the favourable economic situation, the British bourgeoisie were able to make considerable concessions in response to the demand of their working people. But with the advent of the 20th century the advantageous economic position began to be seriously undermined, and as we have seen in earlier chapters, since World War I, the ruling class in Britain has had nothing to offer its people save mass unemployment. Distressed Areas and the threat of war.

The existence of democracy in Britain and imperialism abroad was based upon the industrial monopoly (and therefore relative prosperity) of Britain in the 19th century. With that monopoly gone, the bourgeoisie can no longer maintain their position and profits by handing out concessions; from their point of view the working classes must be taught to accept what comes to them without question, and since the working people have of course become much more militant and class conscious, the ruling classes see the very existence of elementary democracy as a vital threat to their own privileged position.

In the development of this reactionary attack the experience of administration of the oppressed colonial countries is of great importance. Even though the Labour movement is more militant and better organised than ever before in its history, the colonial domination exercised by the imperialists affords great reserves of economic power and political strength with which to fight the rising movement for freedom and socialism. This is what the well-known Marxist historian, R. Palme Dutt, says of the relation between imperialism in India and internal politics in Britain.

“From the conquest of India”, he writes “in the middle of the 18th century this strand of the direct influence of empire on British internal politics can be continuously traced.

The influence of the 'Nabobs'\* on the corruption of 18th century politics and of the pre-Reform Parliament is notorious. The Reform Ministry of Fox in 1783 was defeated over India and gave place to the long rule of reaction, the tenacious counter-revolutionary hostility to the French Revolution and the postponement of democratic reform in England. When the Reform Bill of 1832 replaced the old (landlord and finance oligarchy) ascendancy by the 19th century domination of Lancashire, it was the role of Lancashire in the exploitation of India that played no small part in frustrating the aspirations of 19th century liberalism and guiding it along the path which led to its outcome in liberal imperialism. From the camp of the Anglo-Indian rulers. (Anglo-Indians meaning those Britishers who were in business or administration in India) trained in the methods of despotic domination, have been continuously recruited the forces of reaction in British internal politics, from the days of a Wellington to the days of a Curzon or a Lloyd. In the rifts and currents within Conservatism the close connection between the Anglo-Indians and the die-hards can be continuously traced."

Britain owned before the war some 1,000 million sterling (about Rs. 1,300 crores), invested in India, a figure which represented about a quarter of the total British capital investment in the world. It was estimated by two Indian economists, Shah and Khambata, that in 1921-22 the annual tribute (made up of interest payments, profits of business, home charges, etc.) amounted to no less than £150 million (about Rs. 19.5 crores), the equivalent of £17,000 per head of every super-tax payer in Britain (Rs. 221,000). In recent years the figures for 'tribute' have been variously estimated to be between £135 and £150 million sterling every year.

This is the reality of British exploitation in India. This wealth, taken from the Indian peoples, reinforces the power and

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\*The Nabobs were men who returned from India enriched from the plunder they had looted. The pre-Reform Parliament refers to the Parliaments prior to the 1832 Franchise Act, which gave the vote to the middle classes.

the strength of the minority of monopoly-capitalists, the 7% who own 85% of the total wealth.

Is it not clear that the British imperialists will fight with all the resources at their disposal in order to retain India as a colonial country? And is it not patently obvious that the task of the British Labour movement in struggling for their own freedom is made a thousand-fold more difficult because of the strength which their imperialists derive from colonial exploitation? There can be no difference of opinion between the British Labour movement and the Indian liberation movement. Their enemy is a common one, appearing as the landlords, capitalists and bankers in Britain and the imperialists in India.

The exploiters of both countries are one and the same people. Halifax goes from India to become Foreign Secretary in the most reactionary Conservative Government of modern times. Sir John Anderson, former Governor of Bengal becomes a Cabinet Minister. Before that he was the representative of British Imperialism in its fight against Irish republicanism in 1919-1921. Lord Lloyd, who was Governor of Bombay, returned to England to become one of the most reactionary and pro-Fascist leaders of the Conservative Party, a friend of Franco and an enthusiastic supporter of German and Italian Fascism. Amery was a former Director of Cammell Laird (shipbuilders), the South-West Africa Company and the Southern Railway. Lord Linlithgow, on returning from India, became a Director of the Midland Bank, one of England's "Big Five" banks. Winston Churchill himself, outstanding in his opposition to the Labour movement vigorously opposed even the limited concessions of the 1935 India Act.

There are other reasons why the demand for full independence for India is a demand which the British working-class movement must support *in its own interests*. In Britain the workers have, in the last 100 years, built up their organisations and forced their employers to reduce hours of work and increase wages. In India the trade union movement is still very weak. The existence of a vast source of cheap labour is a direct menace to the standard of living of the British worker. Higher profits can be earned where there are no restrictions upon exploitation and British capital has poured into India because of the

opportunities to earn higher rate of surplus value than in the home country.

The flourishing jute industry in Calcutta and the declining industry in Dundee, Scotland, is a striking example of this process, which leads to mass unemployment in Britain and increased exploitation in India. The search for more and more profit has nothing to do with patriotism. If the British capitalist considers he can obtain more for his money in India or in any other colonial country, then he will transfer his capital, regardless of the social effects in Britain itself. The standard of living of the British worker can only be safeguarded by an India which refuses to allow its own worker to be exploited. And that can only come about when India is free.

There are further dangers for British democracy in the continued exploitation of India and the other colonial countries. Business, trade and administration in India offer remunerative employment to the young men of the upper and middle classes, those in particular who have been able to afford a University education in Britain. Their lives are spent in absolute and bureaucratic rule over millions of Indians. They are a law unto themselves. Their minds are conditioned by an environment completely different from that in the home country.

In India there is no check upon their actions and they easily become tyrannical and unjust with the associated prejudices of race and colour. These men, civil servants, administrators, technicians and businessmen constitute very handy material for a native British Fascist movement. Democracy and democratic methods are alien to their outlook ; it is easy to persuade them that the technique of oppression they have been accustomed to use in India would be just as usefully employed in Britain. And since, in the majority of cases, they draw handsome pensions, the identification of their own personal stake in Empire with what they consider to be the interests of the whole country is easily made.

The Army in India is only the most striking example of anti-democratic ideas and practice. The Army as a whole is deliberately isolated from the Indian people ; since the Army in peacetime is used in India mainly as a police force, contact with civilians must be reduced to a minimum and the soldier is encouraged

to look upon India and the Indians with contempt and hostility.

This creation of an Army, trained to put down nationalist movements and strikes in India is a very great potential danger to the British people themselves. In the past, troops have always been used in times of great crisis. (The 1926 General Strike is the best example.) The coercive apparatus of the state has at all times been at the disposal of the property-owners. If the Armed Forces are not to be a barrier to the forward march of the British people, the present undemocratic tendencies, among the officer class in particular, must be actively and constantly checked and discouraged.

The use of military forces, trained to firing on colonial peoples, can easily be turned against the British people in times of upheaval and at a critical stage of their own struggle. Since the higher ranks of the Army are drawn from the propertied classes, the distinction between the 'natives' of a colonial liberation movement and the 'Reds' and 'agitators' of the British Labour movement is not one which will lead to different treatment. Both will be regarded as enemies of that class with which the officers have most sympathy.

It may very well be argued at this stage that although British Labour and the Indian independence movement have the same enemy to fight, nevertheless the granting of Indian independence (meaning the abolition of exploitation) might very well lead to a lowering of the standard of living of the British people.

This opinion is certainly widely held among Indians of all classes. Even if it were true, there could still be no moral right for British Labour to continue the exploitation so long carried on by their imperialists.

The answer, however, to this argument does not rest upon moral grounds. Indians would rightly be suspicious if it did. The fact is that such arguments are based on a total lack of understanding of the economics of imperialism and of the crisis with which it has been confronted in the past 25 years.

The first point to note is that no one shouts this argument more loudly than the imperialists themselves. That in itself should make us wary of accepting such opinions at their face value. Churchill in 1935, for example said in a radio broadcast : " If we

lose India, if we had the same treatment from a Home Rule India as we had, to our sorrow, from a Home Rule Ireland, it would be more like two million bread winners in this country who would be tramping the streets and queuing up at the Labour Exchanges."

Churchill forgot to mention that the number of unemployed at the time of his broadcast was 1,800,000, a mere 200,000 less than the figure he had tried to use as a bogey with which to frighten the British working people against agreeing to Indian independence !

This line of argument is pernicious nonsense, false in practice and vicious in principle. British imperialism is doomed ; for the sake of hypothetical crumbs to be obtained from the profits of colonial exploitation, the British working class is asked to become a joint partner in that exploitation. In reply, the British worker asks the imperialists what have been the real advantages which have accrued to the people, as opposed to the monopoly-capitalist, from imperialist exploitation. The debit can be listed and it is hardly flattering to the apologists of imperialism.

In the last 25 years, a beneficent and kindly imperialism has 'granted' the British people the following benefits :

Two world wars, in the first of which a million men were killed ; in the second about 400,000.

Never less than 1½ million working men and women were unemployed at any one time. In 1931-32 the figure was over 3 millions.

By 1936 the standard of living of the nation had improved to the extent that only one-half were too poor to maintain an adequate all-round diet. Not more than one-third were suffering from serious mal-nutrition.

Babies who were clever enough to choose their parents from the wealthy classes had 6 to 1 chance of living in the first year over those infants who were born into poor families. These are the figures, taken from the British Medical Journal, *The Lancet*. They refer to deaths per 1,000 of babies in the first year of their life.

	<i>Deaths per 1,000</i>		
Unemployed overcrowded poor	• • •	• •	153
Overcrowded poor	• •	• •	108
Middle and upper classes	• •	• •	23

According to the same article, 63% of the total deaths of children under one year could be attributed to "adverse social conditions."

The growth of the 'Distressed Areas' was the most startling social phenomenon of the period between the two wars. Unemployment, bad housing, underfeeding were all features of these neglected and forgotten 'black spots.' Even in the most prosperous years, the incidence of unemployment remained as high as 20% (S. Wales, Lancashire and Scotland).

Our period ends with the Second World War, the result of pro-Fascist appeasement and an obstinate anti-Soviet policy. 60,000 civilians, men, women and children, have been killed in air-raids ; hundreds of thousands injured. In London alone 800,000 houses have been seriously damaged by bombing ; 250,000 beyond repair.

The grim reality of imperialism in Britain is seen to be far removed from the rosy picture painted by the Tory publicists and politicians. The war of 1914-18 shattered for ever the hopes of those who believed that imperialism contained within it the possibilities of unlimited expansion. In the post-1918 period there remained only the permanent crisis of world capitalism, the solution of which was found in Fascism and war.

The alternative must be found in friendly productive relations between equal states. An independent India will have great need of the British workshop just as Britain, in order to feed herself and maintain a rising standard of living, must sell its goods on the world market, and in particular to those countries like India, who have so much leeway to make up in the health and conditions of life of their peoples.

The present position is that India is a poor market for British goods, because the purchasing power of the Indian people is so low. An independent India, freed from the oppression of an alien race, will pursue a policy of industrial and agricultural development, designed to raise the poverty-stricken standard of

living in the shortest possible time. A free India will become prosperous and happy ; the achievement of that prosperity will be very materially assisted by the help of the industrial countries of the West and in particular of Britain.

India will need vast quantities of capital goods in order to begin her own industrialisation ; once landlordism is abolished, India too will need markets for her growing agricultural production. Trade relations between equal states can only be of mutual advantage to both ; the industrialisation of a former backward country does not harm the interests of those countries already possessing large scale industries and highly developed productive powers. A rising standard of living the world over is not something to be deplored, but welcomed by countries like Britain and America. Once mankind has solved its political problems, the question of economic relations between various countries is simply one of exchanging goods and services for the material benefit of all.\*

It may be argued at this point that although under socialism exploitation will cease and trade between nations will be as between brother and brother, yet today we have not arrived at that stage. Over five-sixths of the world capitalism still exists, albeit in a much weakened condition. That is quite true. The argument being made here is a two-fold one. Firstly, imperialism cannot solve the problems of employment and security on the basis of exploitation of colonial countries like India. Secondly,

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\*How India today is such a bad market for British goods can be seen by comparing the export-import figures of Britain with India, Australia and Canada.

	Population in Lakhs	Exports to Britain in £ thousands	Imports from Britain in £ thousands
India and Burma (1931 figures)	.. 3,528	64,693	39,091
Australia (1938 figures)	.. 69	71,732	37,520
Canada (1931 figures)	.. 103	88,848	27,551

(These figures are taken from the **Statesman's Year Book** of 1940.)

Thus Australia with a population less than one-fifth of India's occupies as important a place in British trade as India does.

The real truth is that continued domination of India helps not British trade—and therefore British production and the British people but, as shown on page 77 it helps **British capitalists** who can only safeguard their profits by keeping India enslaved.



the people in the imperial countries are coming to realise that their bread and butter is intimately bound up with the freeing of the colonies and rapid rise in their conditions of living.

During the war years, the volume of British output increased by roughly 40% as compared with 1938; American production has increased  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times. This in spite of  $5\frac{1}{4}$  million people in the Armed Forces and the Civil Defence Services. Unless the colonial and semi-dependent peoples in Asia and Africa are given the opportunity to raise their standard of living, and that means freedom, the great productive powers of America and Britain will find no outlet and the result will be again mass unemployment. It has been estimated that in radio sets and automobiles alone, to bring the rest of the world up to the American level, would require 600 million radio sets and 450 million extra vehicles.

Look for a moment at an estimate of the economic requirements of China, made by an American journalist in 1943 : 100,000 miles of railway which would require 20 million tons of steel 25,000 locomotives, 300,000 railway wagons and 30,000 railway coaches ; 500,000 automobiles a year for 10 years, one million miles of new all-weather highways ; power plants to produce 20 million kilowatts ; 80 million telephones ; one million new houses a year ; 320,000 cotton looms ; 10 million tons of ocean-going shipping.

A similar list could be drawn up for India and all the other colonial countries. Is it not plain that full employment in the already highly industrialised countries depends on such plans being put into operation all over the world. The tremendously increased productive capacity of Britain which has resulted from the war, can only find an outlet provided the possibilities of markets are enormously extended.

It has been estimated that the national income of Britain increased by over £13,000 in the war years (a figure based on the 1936 price level). The war has seen a tremendous increase in productive possibilities. On September 19, 1944 the *London Financial News* wrote, "The single discovery of high-speed tool steel is thought to have increased overall industrial efficiency by at least 15 per cent. More recently welding has been having a comparable effect." Another financial journal wrote in August

1944, "During the war there has been a great expansion of the machine tool manufacturing capacity of this country, and it is now estimated to be some 10 times as great as during the last war, notwithstanding the considerable shrinkage which occurred in the twenty years up to 1938."

Given the continuance of imperialist exploitation, India will remain a totally inadequate outlet for British goods and thus will condemn the British worker to return to the unemployment, malnutrition and misery that was his lot between the two wars. A free India, existing on fraternal relations with a progressive Britain, will welcome technical, industrial and commercial assistance from her previous oppressor, will provide an immense market for the vitally necessary heavy machinery and delicate instruments that India must have in order to emerge from its backward colonial state as a major industrial nation.

What is the guarantee that such assistance will not again take the form of economic bondage of the weaker country? In the first place, it will be an arrangement between two free states. India will naturally and quite rightly only accept economic assistance on the basis that no political obligations are involved.

Her Government will ensure that British capital invested is not allowed to be a means of exploiting Indian labour; the first concern of an Indian National Government will obviously be the welfare of the people, and no capitalist, whether native or foreign will be permitted to use labour below a level which is consistent with a much higher standard of living than exists at present. An independent India is therefore the guarantee that future economic relations with Britain or any other highly developed state will never again degrade and exploit the workers and peasants.

The history of Britain and America affords a good example of the benefits to be derived from large scale trade between two independent nations. Prior to the American War of Independence Britain had regulated American economic and political affairs. There is a very close parallel with the situation in India today. The American colonies were regarded as existing only for the benefit of the mother country. Industry, because it would have competed with British industry, was stifled; laws were passed favourable to the interests of British manufacturers, mer-

chants and investors. The American colonies were expected to produce the raw materials, grain, lumber, cotton for British industry and to buy British finished products at high prices.

The revolt of the American colonies in the 1770s broke for ever their economic exploitation by Britain. Since then trade between the two countries has increased a thousandfold. *There was more British capital prior to 1939 invested in North America (including Canada) than in the whole of India.* And yet there is no suggestion that such trade has been detrimental to American interests. The investment of British capital has not meant the political subjection of either America or Canada. Both are free states with complete freedom in their internal affairs, but British capital and industry, especially in the middle of the 19th century, very materially helped in the rise of these countries to the great industrial states they are today.

With the abolition of imperialism, the productive resources of the world have a gigantic task to fulfil in order that the standards of living of the Asiatic and African peoples can be speedily raised to a level at which want and poverty no longer exist. Only the co-operation of free and independent nations can achieve this noble aim for which mankind has been struggling for so long.

We have come to the end of this short account of the problem of the British Labour movement. We have tried to show the rise of the Labour movement in Britain and the development of an increasing body of progressive opinion, grouped around the Communist Party, which looks to the final abolition of the imperialist system as the only solution for war, poverty and colonial oppression. The Communist Party and its allies envisage the fight against capitalism in Britain and the struggle of the colonial peoples against imperialism as aspects of the same battle for world freedom.

The conflict between the two opposing tendencies within the British Labour movement is by no means over ; nor must it be forgotten by the friends of British Labour abroad that those who are inclined to the policy of compromise *are still the strongest section within the whole movement.* The progressive forces have made very important advances ; but these advances have not yet resulted in *decisive changes* within the Labour movement. We

have confidence that the future lies with us ; but let no one over-exaggerate the present strength, developing though it is day by day, of the progressive forces in Britain. It has taken two world wars and mass unemployment and distress in the intervening period to build a revolutionary party of national importance which completely repudiates the tactics of class collaboration both at home and abroad. The future struggle to overcome these ideas in the wider Labour movement cannot be dismissed lightly. It is the crucial problem of British politics today. And it cannot be emphasised too much that *the organised progressive forces around the Communist Party are still a minority, though a growing minority, within the Labour movement as a whole.* Certainly the present world situation is making more clear the conflict between those who look with confidence to a world free from oppression and those who are fearful, timid and afraid of what they consider to be the still almighty power of monopoly-capitalism.

We Communists and progressives in Britain recognise that there is a great stirring in the world, "a forward thrusting and overflowing of human hope" which, against all its adversaries, will achieve ultimate victory. We have our own fight ; there are no illusions with us about the difficulties that lie ahead. But we also know, that as the Labour movement of the strongest imperialism, our obligation to the oppressed in India and the other colonial countries is not something which we can ever forget. Our bounden duty lies in helping and assisting the exploited peoples to throw off their alien yoke. Unless we do everything in our power, we also know that our struggle will be impossible of achievement.

We must, and shall, demand of the Labour Government that freedom for India is granted forthwith. India must be allowed to work out her own salvation without interference from anyone. We extend a fraternal hand to the Indian liberation movements. Your fight is our fight ; with the realisation of Indian independence the whole world will have taken a mighty step forward in the achievement of freedom, security and brotherhood for all peoples. Upon the struggle of the Indian people depends not only the future well-being and the happiness of the Indian peoples, but just as much, the well-being, the happiness and the prosperity of the people of Britain.

## APPENDIX

### RESOLUTION ON INDIA

[Below is the full text of the resolution on India that was carried unanimously by the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of great Britain, held in London, November 25 to 27, 1945.]

THE NEW WORLD SITUATION BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE MILITARY DEFEAT of German and Japanese fascist-imperialism, in the attainment of which the Indian peoples played a vital part, opens up new perspectives and new possibilities for the Indian peoples.

The newly-elected Labour Government in this country is now faced with fresh opportunities to negotiate the settlement of India's future on the basis of the recognition of India's right to freedom.

This Congress expresses dissatisfaction with the proposals made by Mr. Attlee on behalf of the Labour Government on September 19, 1945, because they do not constitute a decisive step towards such a settlement. *Congress declares that it is necessary to break entirely with the policies for India inherited from previous Governments, and in particular to abandon as a basis for negotiations the "Cripps" offer of 1942.*

An essential condition for giving practical effect to Labour's desire to give Indians the right to frame their own democratic constitution lies in the calling of a democratically elected Constituent Assembly based on adult franchise.

Unlike the "constitution-making body" proposed by the British Government, the Constituent Assembly must be created by direct election and not through the existing Provincial Assemblies, and it must include democratically elected representatives from the Indian States and not nominees of the Princes.

Such a Constituent Assembly, being truly representative of the Indian peoples would not only make a practical reality of Indian independence but would ensure that the full fruits of that independence would be enjoyed by the working masses of India and not solely by the privileged vested interests.

The Constituent Assembly must, of course, be a sovereign body whose decisions would be unchallengeable by any other authority.

To make possible the calling together of such Constituent Assembly Congress urges the Labour Government to arrange immediately for the preparation of electoral lists based on adult franchise for the whole of India, to release without delay all political prisoners, and to withdraw all bans and orders restricting freedom of movement, speech and association.

To deal with the immediate and urgent social and economic problems which are now causing tremendous distress in India. Congress urges that interim representative governments be established in the Provinces to function until the results of the Provincial elections are known ; and that immediately after the Central Assembly elections, a responsible Government at the Centre, composed of representatives of the leading political parties and minorities, be set up.

Independence for India will mean India taking her place alongside all those other countries throughout the world which are advancing along the road to freedom and democracy. A subject India will make impossible the achievement of lasting peace, prosperity and happiness in the world. *It is in the interests of all peoples, and of the British people in particular, that India should become a free and sovereign country.*

The Communist Party pledges itself to do all in its power to ensure the carrying out of this policy.

# CHINA'S WAY OUT OF THE CIVIL WAR

By Mao Tse-tung

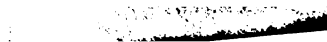
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